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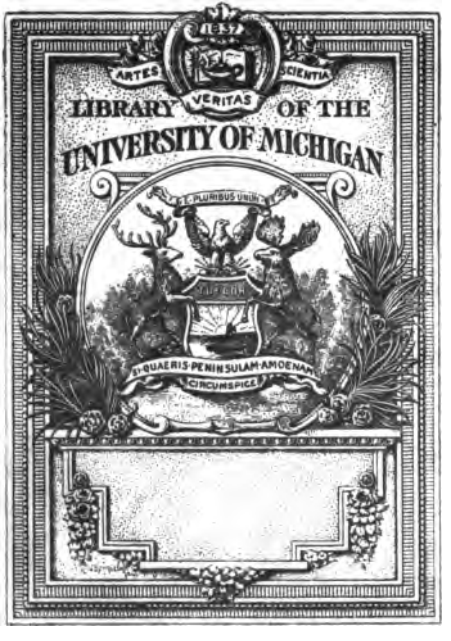
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VOL. 3706.

MY POOR RELATIONS. By MAARTEN MAARTENS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

MY POOR RELATIONS

STORIES OF DUTCH PEASANT LIFE

BY

MAARTEN MAARTENS

AUTHOR OF "GOD'S FOOL," "SOME WOMEN I HAVE KNOWN," ETC. ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1904.

CONTENTS

OF VOLUME II.

	Page
The Notary's Love Story	7
The Banquet	41
"Silly"	69
The Minister's Dog	93
Tom Potter's Pilgrimage	123
"The Trick"	145
Why he loved her	171
In Extremis	191
A Bit of To-Day	205
A Comedy of Crime	237

THE NOTARY'S LOVE STORY.

MY POOR RELATIONS.

THE NOTARY'S LOVE STORY.

THIS is not a love story. Not a story, at least, of the fashionable little love with a big L. The little Love that explodes and fizzles, like a little flaring match.

The Notary has never heard of loving or being in love. Only of love-making, the foolish pastime of red-faced lads and lasses, on summer Sunday evenings, among the darkling woods. He disapproves of it.

The village street of Hardeveld lay winking beneath the glare of the savage August sun. Its white cheeks glowed; its green eyes glistened; at its feet the grass blades shrivelled and curled among the

red, red-hot paving-bricks. Across every house-front the shutters closed tight, in alternate bars and slits; there was not a breath of motion, not a flutter of shadow, all down the shiny road. Nothing alive but the Lord of an empty Heaven, spreading, like a truculent Pacha, his ample glory before a veiled and cowering Harem.

The whitest-robed and closest-veiled of the houses was the Notary's. A cat pressed up against the blistering door. The Notary's tortoiseshell cat, Rhubarb.

Inside, the Notary's clerks lay, clammy, across their foolscap. He himself sat silent in his sanctum, the Notary, Anthony Barbas. A quantity of papers were spread before him; he was dozing. He had a right to doze; it was the hour of his fifteen minutes' nap.

He never, in all his uniform life, did anything he hadn't a right to do. It was his method never to do anything else. "All the rest," he used to say, "is waste of time." I speak of him in the past, yet the good man lives, and, therefore, I know, is doing his duty still. Method with him has become a sort of madness, not an easy thing in a country notary. Many times a week he must drive to all-day auctions in untrodden nooks and by-ways; at any moment he may be summoned by any scheming mortal anywhere.

His only systematic weakness at the time I knew him was his nightly pint of Burgundy, "St. Georges." As the days of the week are uneven in number and his habits are regular, he finished the bottle on Sunday. The one failing had begotten another, his sole bodily ailment. He called it sciatica. The doctor called it gout.

In the quiet house an unobtrusive housekeeper moved smoothly round her middle-aged master. The cat purred, when cosiness seemed to require it. The big white poodle lived, a daily demonstration that life is an enjoyable thing if taken leisurely. His intelligence had never been wearied by useless performances. "Not even a dumb animal," said the Notary, "should be needlessly taught tricks."

The clock chimed the quarter, and Anthony Barbas opened his spectacled eyes. The eyes were pale, like the face, and the face was somewhat pompous, like the figure. Anthony was a comfortably rounded man, respectably angular in feature, profoundly commonplace. His thoughts had been active while he dozed. All the morning he had been abnormally occupied with himself. Thinking of that first white hair he had brushed to the dusty-brown surface in dressing.

He had worn gently, for he was close upon fifty. Of late years he had had his sciatica to remind him how very well he felt. Until to-day he had always understood that man was mortal and life everlasting. To-day he knew that life is exceedingly short. It is an experience common to all thoughtful men with one white hair or more. Life is short. And when first we hear the clock strike we look up: 'tis half past!

Anthony Barbas sighed gently, perusing the close-written deed before him. It was not particularly interesting, not even important. His eyes escaped to the lines of light between the shutter-bars. From all these well-screened houses you can look out as much as you care to. That is the beauty of discretion. It cloaks.

"I shall do it to-day," said Anthony Barbas. "It" was a proposal of marriage to Mejuffrouw Sophy Mulder. Mejuffrouw Sophy Mulder was a pleasant young woman of twenty-eight, the impecunious companion of a well-to-do elderly cousin, Mejuffrouw Martha Mary Quint. For the last three years the Notary had intended to marry Sophy Mulder. Often and often had he made up his mind to do it, and have done. But the modification of his domestic economy appeared too incisive, seen close. There

was the dilemma. Was it right? Was it honourable to take advantage of Miss Mulder's position? How would faithful Sarah Mopsel stomach the insinuation that she had not tended her master well? Was it fair to risk tardy disparagement of Rhubarb and Ruff? "Every benefaction," the Notary was wont to say, "creates an obligation. For the benefactor."

He would reason lengthily, stringing together alternate pros and cons. That is a sensible attitude towards marriage, before thirty, when men seldom assume it. Not that he doubted his personal predilections. He would greatly have liked to marry pretty, pleasant Sophy Mulder. His evenings were lonely; his comfort oppressed him; he wanted something more than comfort. It was not his fault that he had not married in time (as women phrase it). His youth had been poverty-stricken, burdened by the care of a mother and sister, both of whom had died when Anthony, past forty, was able to support them. It had taken him some time to shake himself to rights in the belated loosening of his life. Now, he was old and unaccustomed, full of little twists, uninteresting, yet not selfish enough to make a successful bachelor. He hesitated around Sophy Mulder as a moth near a candle, a bee by a flower.

Yesterday he had heaps of time. To-day his feelings were those of the man who must catch a train.

"I shall do it this evening," he said, "as soon as the sun has sunk low in the heavens." He sighed suddenly, and shivered mentally. There was an ugly echo about the words.

A quick step resounded along the silent, stifled street. He knew it was Sophy's; every Thursday afternoon, at two precisely, she passed, on her way to the almshouses. Peering cautiously, he saw her go by, fresh and refreshing, like a cloud. The Notary wiped his hot forehead.

And once more he built up his resolution, striving to make assurance doubly sure. All the same, he knew that his courage would fail him five hours hence. How many a man has missed a happy marriage because he has to get his hat and go and see about it!"

Sarah Mopsel broke in mildly on his musings. He had been very gentle to her, apologetic even, that morning, when she smoked his coffee. "No, no, it was good coffee," he protested, and then, still unerringly truthful, "good coffee up to a certain point. The point when you put it in the pot, Sarah."

"That young man Olland," said Sarah now, "is

asking to see you. John Olland, the 'pothicary 'prentice that makes love to the hussy next door."

"Show him in," replied the Notary. "Take a seat, young man. The dog won't hurt you."

"'Tis that grease-spot on your trousers he's smelling at," remarked Sarah in retiring. She abhorred the girl next door.

John Olland reddened. He was a harmless-looking creature, not yet five-and-twenty, with a wave of yellow hair. He deposited a big case under his chair, like an infant's coffin wrapped in baize. "I am come, Mynheer the Notary," he stammered, "I am come, as you may possibly perceive——" the door flew open. "Notary," cried the intruding Sarah, her melancholy features ablaze, "you know I wouldn't venture to trouble you, but if *you* could give him a bit of *my* mind about Susan——" she was gone.

The Notary cleared his throat. "Her manner is wrong, but her meaning is right," he said gravely. "You live almost opposite, Mynheer Olland. You should *not* serenade the servant next door. The habit in itself is objectionable. And, besides, it disturbs your neighbours' sleep."

"But I only do it for practice," feebly protested

the unfortunate assistant, "she likes me to do it. I don't mean *her!*"

"Indeed!" cried the Notary, veering round in a fume.

"She knows I don't. I told her it was practice. She thinks that it's very good fun. And, surely, Mynheer the Notary, it does nobody any harm. The liquid sounds of the violin these beautiful moonlit nights——"

"I prefer sleep," interrupted the Notary, restlessly re-arranging his papers.

"But that's not what I wanted to speak about," the young man hurried on, perceiving the movement; his chest broadened, his eye brightened; he was not half a bad-looking young fellow. "I came to ask you to lend me some money," he said cheerfully.

"Oh, of course," retorted Anthony. "Why?"

"When you want money you always go to notaries, don't you?" said Olland reproachfully.

"I don't. Perhaps you thought that was what notaries were made for?"

"Ye—es. Partly."

"Your information was incorrect."

"Look here, Mynheer Barbas. Let me tell you all about it, just one minute"—he flung himself nervously forward, tugging at the violin case. "You

know me as the apothecary's assistant opposite. But I'm not that. I wasn't born to be that. You were speaking of my serenade to Su—— to Susan. That's what I am, Mynheer Barbas, by birth and by right, a musician. I've never been properly taught—worse luck!—all the same I can play—and compose." He drew breath, hotly.

"Pose. You were about to remark?" The lawyer abstractedly studied his finger-tips.

"I don't say I'm an unparalleled genius—like Beethoven. People come with a story like that to practical men like yourself and get written down idiots at once. All I say is I've plenty of talent. I want to earn my living as a teacher—meanwhile. And now there's an opportunity, such as'll never recur, of buying out an old creature that's anxious to retire. It's in my native town; he's got a lot of cheap pupils. Some day I shall be a popular composer—and pay you back. Look here, Notary. Six weeks ago I sent two of my 'Capriccios' to Brahms —he's a composer, too, and a sort of connexion of mine; at least, his name's also Johannes, and, when you've got nobody, that seems like a kind of link. Yesterday I had his answer—you see, they do answer occasionally."

"And what does he say?" exclaimed the Notary, bending forward with sudden interest.

"It isn't a very long answer. But I hardly expected it would be. 'Endeavour is always an admirable thing,' he says, 'yet it is better not to try again than never to succeed.' Of course it is. 'Endeavour,' you see, he says, 'is an admirable thing.' Isn't that encouraging? A great man like Brahms advising *me* to persevere!"

"My time is much occupied," was the Notary's unexpected reply. He spoke irritably, from sheer disappointment. He looked away from John Olland's ingenuously upturned countenance. "Presently I must —ahem—pay a visit." He glanced nervously at the clock. "I have not, as you appear to imagine, immense cellars full of gold at my disposal; but, of course, I can sometimes—for my clients—negotiate a loan. On excellent security. Yours would be——?"

"My talent," replied Johannes.

"Quite so. Your security would be your assurance. And the sum required? A couple of hundred florins?"

"Fifteen hundred," replied Johannes, a little crestfallen.

"I fear I can hardly manage it. Good-day, Mynheer Olland. Take a bit of unsought advice. Stick

to your pestle and mortar. Few men want music, and all men, sooner or later, want pills."

John Olland's face was purple. He rose to his feet. "I'm not ashamed of the shop," he said. "It's not that. I could have stayed on here quietly enough, and worked at the composing meanwhile. But it's Susan. Hang it, Mynheer Barbas, the real Susan's name is Sophy. I'm awfully sweet on her. I'm longing to marry her. And no one could ask her to take up with a chemist, though perhaps she might stoop—for stooping it *would* be—to a Brahms."

"'Sophy,'" repeated the Notary, rapidly reviewing the few beauties of Hardeveld. An increasing anxiety sharpened his accent and features.

"It's Sophy Mulder. The 'Serenade' is to her; only I never can let her hear it, because of her old cousin and—the watchman. I love her—awfully. My parrot—you know my clever parrot?"—("I do, indeed," inserted the Notary, bitterly)—"yells out 'Susan' from morning to night. I had to make it 'Susan' but he means 'Sophy.' Your neighbour's servant knows he don't mean her. You can't think how it cheers me in the shop."

"And Miss Mulder returns your affections?" faintly murmured the Notary.

"She's never heard of them as yet. Had you lent

me the money"—wistfully—"I should have gone to Miss Martha Mary to-night. Won't you let me just try that 'Capriccio?' I brought my instrument with me on purpose. You will see there is really something in it. Brahms liked it"—the violin was already at his shoulder, a preliminary shriek swept the strings.

"Not here! Not in office hours!" cried the Notary, now also erect, hardly knowing what he said. "Mynheer Olland, I consider you impertinent. The lady in question is five times your age, and is also your social superior!" He threw open the door to the office. There was a sudden scratching of pens. The office seemed almost hotter than the sanctum.

"Five years older, you mean," corrected the apothecary's assistant politely. "It's three. Well, sir, I suppose it can't be helped. No offence was intended. Excuse me. Good day, sir."

As the visitor departed through one door, the Notary opened the other. He just stopped for his tall hat and stick, in the hall, and then, avoiding the business entrance from the garden, burst out into the roadway, upsetting the cat. He tore up the dead street and round a corner. Then he paused for

breath, mopping his neck with a red pocket handkerchief, and reflected that after having waited five years, he might now have waited to put on a clean shirt. At least he could have extracted the tell-tale hair. He had left it untouched that morning, in the vain yearning that it might rebrown.

"The insolence! the idiocy!" he muttered, as he swayed across the village square. "But it's I that am the idiot with my shilly-shally selfishness! Had she fallen a reluctant victim—poor unbefriended orphan —to that blockhead serenader—I—I—I." He panted along the sunlit parsonage palings. The minister's slow head arose above them. "Somebody dying," concluded the minister. "Humph! Sending for him, not for me."

Miss Martha Mary Quint was one of the chief notables in a village destitute of gentry. She enjoyed (outrageously) the reputation of being the richest person in the place. For years she had lived with her now defunct sister, Miss Mary Martha, in the house which their father had built and bequeathed to them. The latter worthy, a shrewd master-builder and prop of the national church, had all his life long kept one eye on the main chance here below, and the other on possible awards up above. He had always proclaimed himself prosper-

parlour. "I have been wanting to send for you—for days."

"I have not been from home, madam," replied the lawyer, as soon as he could trust himself to speak. "I myself am now venturing to approach you on a matter of considerable importance——"

"My affairs first, if you please," interrupted the lady. Her harsh voice shook. He wondered could she possibly be "nervous."

"Let me speak at once or I shan't speak at all," she continued. "I want you to make me a will. There, it's out. Now the rest'll be easy enough." She gave a little gasp. "Make me a w... It sounds mighty queer. I've always had sufficient will of my own for this side of the grave, at any rate. Mary Maria died intestate and very proper, with me behind her, but in my case that won't do. So, although I never did such a thing in my life before, and [illegible] just sit down immediately, Notary, and write off my will."

"My dear lady," expostulated the lawyer, for the [illegible] time in his career [illegible] a will and testament [illegible]

[illegible]——"

[illegible] she cried furiously, seemed to need his

ous and pious, and people had taken him at his own valuation. His first daughter he had named after both the sisters of Bethany. "For, with full respect for the powers that be," he said, "seems to me you want the pair of them, to get through all round. Why, without Martha to help her, Mary would never have got to the other side at all! So Martha for this world, Dominé, and Mary for the next." "And you put Martha first?" said the minister. "She was the eldest," retorted the deacon.

The birth of a second child had seriously nonplussed him, till, suddenly, on the second day, his knotted brow relaxed. "She must take her chance of this world," he said. "And we'll call her Mary Martha."

Truly enough, Miss Mary Martha had proved the less ungentle of the sisters. She had granted straw when exacting bricks, and her whips had fallen slack beside Miss Martha Mary's scorpions. She had accentuated her other-worldliness by dying before her elder sister. "And on a Sunday, too," said Miss Martha Mary triumphantly.

"I am glad it is you, Notary," exclaimed Miss Martha Mary, rising from her straight-backed chair, as the purple gentleman boiled over into her shaded

parlour. "I have been wanting to send for you—for days."

"I have not been from home, madam," replied the lawyer, as soon as he could trust himself to speak. "I myself am now venturing to approach you on a matter of considerable importance——"

"*My* affairs first, if you please," interrupted the lady. Her harsh voice shook. He wondered, could she possibly be "nervous."

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"My dear lady," expostulated the lawyer, for the fiftieth time in his career, "there is really no cause to feel flurried. The mere consigning to paper of a last will and testament, in itself an exceedingly commendable action——"

"Flurried?" she cried furiously, vexed to read his

thoughts by her own, "do you fancy I fear that I'm going to die, as a consequence of making my will? I am making my will, Mr. Notary, because I am going to die!" she snorted at him. "Two months ago," she hurried on, "the doctor told me I had a heart complaint, warranted to kill without warning. I knew it. 'You may live to be a hundred,' he said. They always say that. So I may. I'm sixty-seven. Had I been Mary Martha, I should have been underground by now."

This was so manifestly correct that the Notary nodded his head.

"So make me a testament," continued the spinster, "and just put in this: 'I leave all my possessions, whatever they are, to Sophia Alethea Mulder, my cousin once removed.'"

The Notary, worn out with the hurry and worry, felt the straight-lined room curve suddenly all around him. "Am I to understand," he stuttered, "that you appoint Miss Sophy Mulder your unconditional heiress and residuary legatee?"

"Of course, you're to understand what I say, Barbas—if you can! Residential legatee, I suppose, is your lawyer's jargon. So she is. She's lived with me now six years and more, and a very good girl she is on the whole. At least, she is good in inten-

tion, which is more than can be said of a servant nowadays."

"But you told me not long ago—I remember it distinctly—that not a penny of yours should ever go to Sophy! I know you did! I know you did!"

"Hoity-toity, do you grudge the girl her better luck? I remember perfectly. It was at the doctor's, Barbas, that evening you trumped my ace. It's three years ago, at the least. And I don't mind telling you now that I thought in those days you were weighing your chances with Sophy. And I wasn't going to have you reckon on any pickings of mine. I stand in my own shoes, Notary. For shame, an old fellow like you! But I know now, of course, I was mistaken. The best girls don't marry, I always say—won't. marry, I mean."

"Miss Sophy Mulder," repeated Anthony dully.

She shot a sharp glance at him. "Barbas," she said, "you are growing old before your time. There's a white hair on the left side over your ear. But there mustn't be any mistake about my will, mind. Perhaps it were better a younger man should make it!"

"As you please," said the Notary stiffly.

"Ta, ta. A young man, and not take a joke

from an old woman! For you are a young man still, or very nearly. One white hair doesn't make a winter. Marry, Anthony Barbas, marry while you still can get a woman under forty. Soon that idea will seem absurd. And now, is my will to be made or not?"

"Perhaps you will permit me to suggest," protested the miserable man, "that stamped paper is required for official documents."

"I know that," responded Miss Quint, "there's a sheet in the *chiffonnière* that the carrier brought me from town. I've had it in the house six weeks."

"I would rather work the clauses out at home," said the Notary; "it is customary——"

"Clauses? There are no clauses. You shall do it here, and at once, or not at all," said Miss Martha Mary Quint.

She marched to the cupboard, and unlocked it, enjoying now, with a certain unction, the long-dreaded ceremonial. The formal arranging of the implements took time.

"And now, it is hopeless and impossible!" reflected Anthony Barbas, his pale eyes staring at the wall. Over and over again he said to himself, "Yesterday I might have done it—any time these

last five years I might have done it! I can never do it now."

"What's worth doing at all is worth doing at once," said Miss Martha Mary, "that's why I waited six weeks." She carefully selected a new pen. "And all things come round to the man who can wait. That's why I'm in such a foolish hurry now. No one would ever have known what fools men are, if it weren't for the proverbs. 'The accumulated wisdom of the centuries,' the paper called them yesterday." "And now, for heaven's sake, Notary, don't be all day about it!" she burst out pettishly, with true human (men call it "feminine") logic, as she laid down the pen before him. "Get it over, and you shall have a glass of my home-made anisette."

The Notary knew the notorious anisette. It had given him the heartburn before.

He settled gloomily down to his work, and laboriously indited the beloved one's name, encurling it in flourishes which made him feel thirty years younger — memories of a caligraphic clerkship, a moth-eaten past. Miss Martha Mary looked over his shoulder. "I suppose I must pay for those whirligigs?" she said.

He looked up in her face. There were tears behind his spectacles; she thought they were rheum.

"Miss Sophia Althea Mulder, spinster—spinster—spinster. Two witnesses are of course required," he said, "in writing. Have you got them in the *chiffonnière* too?"

"Dear me, Anthony Barbas, that's the first time in all these twenty years I've heard you say anything sounding sharp. Not that it could be, really, coming from so mild a man. You don't look well this afternoon; I suppose it's the heat upsets you. Though Sophy keeps this room cool enough, I'm sure, since last week's scolding. Oh, I can manage Sophy! Call in any two men from the street."

"I prefer my own clerks," suggested the Notary, "they are better at keeping the secret——"

"I daresay. And the fees. Nonsense, Barbas, of course you will read—as always—so that nobody understands a word. And besides, all the village may know—I should like it to know—my intentions regarding Sophy!" She threw back the window-blind: suddenly a torrent of golden heat filled the solemn parlour.

On the further side of the dusty road there stretches a sort of common, broken by beech-trees. Under the shade of a prominent giant lounged a solitary individual; his hands in his pockets, his eyes on the house. "There's nobody in sight," cried Miss

Quint with annoyance. "The whole world's a furnace; nobody could venture out but the Three Good Young Men and yourself. Sophy doesn't count. She's an angel. Who's that yonder under the beech-trees? Come here, you, sir, you 'pothicary's 'prentice! Why aren't you doing your duty, concocting poisons? Come here, and make yourself useful, for once, in connexion with death!" She beckoned vehemently.

Barbas started up. "You don't mean to say," he exclaimed, "that you're going to entrust such a secret to yonder young mountebank! Consider, Miss Quint, I beseech you——"

She faced him. "My secrets are my own to betray," she said viciously, "I'm doing what I can for the girl. And she won't nurse me any the better, or worse. Ring the bell for my gardener, Barbas. Good afternoon, Olland. Take a seat. Psha!"

John Olland sat down, darting terrible menaces at Anthony. Deaf Pete was introduced from the pig-sty, and the atmosphere grew heavy with the fragrance of the field. "Phew!" said Miss Martha Mary, clutching her Eau de Cologne bottle. "This is my last will and testament. Read quick, Notary. Please!"

When Barbas' agitated explanation and brief

reading of the document were over, John Olland remained staring angrily from face to face. He considered himself insulted and outwitted by this evil couple of capitalists. He clenched his impotent fists. To offend Sophy's tyrant would be madness. All his accumulated wrath glowed red against the Notary. He flung his signature sprawling across the open page, and, with scornful rejection of the timidly proffered fee, he made for the door.

"A word in your ear, young man!" cried Miss Martha Mary. She lifted her yellow face to his red one. "I spoke to the watchman to-day," she said, "of people who prowl round my house at night! But I see they now come at all hours!"

"I was waiting for the Notary!" murmured Olland. He fairly ran away, and Anthony Barbas ran after him.

"Notary! Notary!" screamed the spinster. "It wasn't *my* business brought you here! Remember that, please, when you make up your bill. And now, what might you want of me, pray?"

"Nothing, nothing. I have changed my mind," replied Anthony, in the doorway.

"I suppose it was an offer of a mortgage. Now, Barbas, I have told you before that the only invest-

ments I believe in are Government securities. You will never see a penny of mine."

"So I quite understand," replied the Notary, disappearing.

"Oh, I quite understand," said the Notary, outside.

Miss Martha Mary resumed her knitting. "And a very lucky thing he came," she mused, "for I don't think I should ever have brought myself to summon him. As for that young noodle's appearance on the scene—why, *that* was simply providential." She nodded, wisely, and rang an angry handbell. Sophy came in, looking strong and cool. "Sophy, I'm sure that it's time for my medicine. I've just left you all my money. So no wonder you want me to die."

Sophy stole her pretty arm round the wrinkled neck. "What a wicked creature you would be," she answered, "if you meant one half you say."

"If I said what I mean, I should be far wickeder," declared the old woman, almost regretfully, and winked.

Anthony Barbas, dully wandering homeward, found the first narrow pathway blocked by the chemist's assistant.

"One moment, please, Notary!" said the young man ceremoniously, "one question, please. When I spoke to you this afternoon about Sophy had you formed any plans of your own?"

The Notary hesitated, wishing for once he had learnt how to lie. With a rush all John Olland's pent-up reproaches rose hissing to the surface.

"I followed you to the house!" he shouted. "What a hurry you were in to betray me! What a joke with the old beldame, while securing the heiress. Ah, you thought I was 'insolent,' did you?—'impertinent' to come in your way! I'm not such a fine gentleman as you; I haven't got any money or position! And she's younger than *you,* never fear!" He fell back half a pace, and the Notary threw up one arm, but the poor fellow's thoughts were not of physical violence. "I wouldn't exchange with you," he said, "not with *you,* Mr. Barabbas."

From the depths of the Notary's own bitter disappointment a smile bubbled up. "Your comparison," he said, "is unfortunate. The notable point about Barabbas was surely that they let him go." The other fell aside with an oath.

The Notary was more to be pitied than John Olland, and he knew it. For his disillusionment, neither so high nor so low, was a dead and definite

level. He had nurtured this plan for five years. There would be no more plans.

He was excessively irritable about the soup, which Sarah Mopsel had burnt. "It's too bad that you cannot attend to me better," he grumbled. Incontinently she sniffed. "You can't say I'm exacting," he exclaimed in desperation. "God forbid," replied Sarah. "And what would you do, then, if I sent you away?" "Go,—and pray God bless you," said Sarah with a gulp. He pushed back his armchair from the table. "Oh, bring me the Burgundy!" he cried. He thought the room looked squalid. He reached for his tobacco-pouch. At this accustomed signal Rhubarb jumped down on his shoulder, and Ruff placed a soothing pink nose between his knees.

It was some days later that Anthony Barbas, as he passed down the street in the hush of a cloudless evening, his sad thoughts bending a back already bowed—stopped suddenly, hearing his own name called. He turned in the middle of the road, his wide hat against the sunset, his arms, and projecting stick, behind his portly frame. A shriek and a whistle greeted him. "Barabbas! Barabbas!" cried the parrot from his perch, "Pretty Susan!" John Olland

stood by the window in a Napoleonic attitude, a sneer on his good-natured face.

The Notary shuffled round again. "No, I shall not complain to the chemist," he muttered, "God bless my soul, what does it signify?" But Sarah was not so half-hearted, she said; and, as the nuisance increased and attracted notice, she threw out dark hints of a mission for Rhubarb. "Peace," said the Notary, suddenly, sternly. "Barabbas! Barabbas!" The little street boys called it.

So the melancholy days went slipping by each other, and nobody got married in the village of Hardeveld. But that had always been the rule, the Hardeveld virgins said. Winter came; the whole world grew old. The Notary had a cough.

He was sitting at his breakfast one foggy day, when a brown paper parcel was brought to him. He opened it listlessly, and there lay the parrot, his persistent tormentor, the sharp eyes glazed in death. "Rhubarb!" exclaimed the Notary, to the tortoiseshell cushion on the hearth rug. *"Rhubarb!"* There was no responsive slink. Besides, cats have no consciences. Their morality is a purr and a grin.

Rhubarb lay blandly smiling, with closed eyes and swelling chops. Anthony gingerly turned the stiff bundle. A paper lay under it.

"SIR,—It's not your cat's doing; I wrung the bird's neck. Serves me right. I behaved like a cad and am very sorry for it.

"JOHN OLLAND.

"P.S.—I couldn't bear to hear him always saying 'Pretty Susan,' anyhow.

"P.P.S.—He was growing very old and mangy."

Anthony dropped the carcase.

There was actually a P.P.P.S.!—"She's a rich woman now, too good for either you or me."

Anthony dropped the paper. He sat looking out of window, wondering what those last words meant. He had heard nothing.

"Here's Mynheer Olland," said Sarah gruffly, at his elbow. "Of course you won't admit him." Her little eyes lengthened at sight of the mess on the floor.

"Yes, he will," said John Olland, in the middle of the room. "Notary, the man's a coward that can only write he was wrong. I've come to say it."

Barbas held out his hand. "What's this," he asked, "about Sophy—Miss Mulder?"

"Haven't you heard? Then they're sure to be here in a moment. Miss Martha Mary was found

dead in her bed this morning. You and I know what that means for Sophy. She's the richest woman in Hardeveld now."

The Notary nodded. "It doesn't make an atom of difference to you or to me," added Olland, "I've long ago given up thinking of her—given up all thought of her, I mean."

The Notary nodded again, busy with his own reflections.

"I suppose she refused you," continued his visitor, "like the plucky creature she is. No offence. I was sorry for you, Mynheer Barbas. After awhile."

"There is Miss Martha Mary's gardener," said the lawyer, rousing himself. "I must go to him, Mynheer Olland. Come and talk to me about the music some evening"—he leaped boldly, self-sacrifice begetting its brother—"and play."

John Olland shook his head. "The music's no good for a livelihood," he said, "not for me. I *can* play, and I *can* compose, but what's the use if nobody buys? So I'm going to be a chemist after all." He turned on his heel.

A few minutes later the Notary was closeted with Miss Sophy for the first time in his life. Sophy sat,

sweetly sorry and tearful, but the Notary was the paler of the two.

"From which written declaration of the defunct now before you," the Notary was saying, "it appears that, after sustaining considerable losses through speculation, she sank the remainder of her means in an annuity which just enabled her to keep up her position in this place. When everything is paid, dear Miss Mulder, you will be practically penniless. I cannot understand"—his face grew fierce—"the comedy of the will."

"It was all she could do for me," replied Miss Sophy gently, "she meant it as a kindness; she thought it would get known and would help me to secure a husband. It was very unselfish of her, really." Miss Sophy smiled faintly through her tears.

"But what now?" cried the agitated lawyer. "What are you going to do?"

"Surely that is a little premature," replied Miss Sophy; "unlearn being an heiress first."

"Will you marry me?" cried Anthony Barbas. "Now, don't go and think me indecent, and your cousin not yet cold. It was brutal of her, I tell you, Miss Sophy. Miss Sophy, I'm a middle-aged man

with a lot of grey hairs and a competence. I'm not rich. Miss Sophy, will you marry me?"

The girl's eyes dropped; her whole frame trembled. "Hush," she said, "hush. You shouldn't speak of such things now, Mynheer Barbas—and here." She cast a timid glance over her shoulder. "You are very good—very good, and I know it. Very kind."

"Which means no," said Anthony softly. "I am old and a fool. I hope to God you will get a better husband, my dear!"

A long silence ensued. "It doesn't matter," said Sophy at length, "about the will. Nobody knows."

"One man knows," said the Notary.

A blush overspread all her pink and white face. "You mean John Olland," she replied. "Oh, but he has got nothing to do with it. It is nothing to him."

Something—he could not have told you what—brought Anthony a sudden revelation as she spoke. He got up. "I will come again this afternoon," he said, "and help you with everything. Good-bye."

He did not go home immediately, but walked into the chemist's and bought four pennyworth of lozenges for his cough. John Olland was alone in

the shop. "Olland," said the Notary carelessly, "you say you were so fond of Miss Mulder once. Have you ever spoken to the lady?"

And John Olland's healthy cheeks grew apple-red at once. "Often," he replied, hard at work on his little parcel. "She was in the choral society, Mynheer the Notary. I used to meet her regularly once a week."

"Nothing, I suppose, has ever passed between you?" The Notary drew circles on the floor with his stick—painfully accurate circles.

"I regret you should consider that question necessary," replied John Olland, hurt. "Am I the proper person to make love to the heiress of Hardeveld?"

"She isn't an heiress, John. She is penniless." The Notary shouldered his stick. "Listen, boy; wait a week or two, and then go and ask her to marry you. If she consents——"

"I—I don't understand," said John Olland, crushing down the little parcel on the counter.

"If she consents, come and talk to me about that little loan of yours. One thousand florins ought to get you a small pharmacy of your own. In another village, John. You won't mind that."

"I—I don't understand," said John Olland. "Was

I wrong after all, this morning, Notary? Had you never proposed to her?"

"You were wrong," said the Notary. "I had never proposed to her." And he walked out of the shop towards his office door.

THE BANQUET.

THE BANQUET.

THEY were sitting in the tidy cottage, at the summer Sabbath midday, round the Sabbath midday meal, the four of them—old Lobbers and his wife, and his two half-sisters, Lisbeth and Maria, tottery and decrepit, all four of them, and a little snuffy and blear-eyed, but neat, like the cottage, with Dutch neatness, of spotless muslins and abundant starch and soap.

Liza, the elder of the stepsisters, a flabby loosely built female, in the careful Poorhouse dress—Liza stretched out a long arm towards the steaming cauldron, but her watchful hostess knocked it aside.

"We ain't all got your teeth!" said Vrouw Lobbers. "Give yer family a chance, if ye can."

"But I ain't had my money's worth yet!" cried Liza, with uplifted fork. "I ain't had my money's worth, Jane!"

"And what d'ye consider yer money's worth, pray?" retorted Vrouw Lobbers, "with potatoes at four florins the——"

"I don't care what's the price o' potatoes. I pay you a silver twopenny bit every Sunday, to come and have my Sunday dinner here, and if I can't be allowed to have my money's worth, I'll go and give my silver somewhere else."

"Where?" interposed her stepbrother, fiercely chewing.

"Anywhere. They'll take me anywhere for twopence—aye, and give me butcher's meat."

Vrouw Lobbers laughed aloud. She was rather a cheerful-looking woman, with a red face in the snowy frills of her cap. "Butcher's meat!" she repeated, vastly amused.

"Butcher's meat!" echoed pensively the younger stepsister, Maria, who lived with the Lobberses, and her eyes rested long on the contents of the pot.

"She lies," said old Lobbers.

"Of course. She knows that as well as you do," assented his wife, still laughing.

"I wish I was dead," said old Liza, making another dash at the dish.

The Vrouw shook her head. "Don't you go tempting the Powers above," she said solemnly. "They've forgotten you. Let well alone, and eat your dinner," and she thoughtfully drew, with her

knife, two fat bits of bacon out of her sister-in-law's reach."

"There's not ten years between the whole lot of us," replied Liza, curiously watching the bacon.

"No. I'm sixty-seven, and you're seventy-five—that's the difference. All the same, your one single back-tooth—for feeding—is worth half a dozen o' mine."

"I haven't no back-tooth, and you know it," replied the spinster, peevishly grinning. "Nor I don't believe you've got half a dozen. I don't need to chew my food. I just bolt it. That does well enough."

"You've nigh killed yourself over-eating several times, all the same," objected her stepbrother.

"Nigh killed ain't near buried," grunted Liza. "And I had a good time while it lasted. Doctor says, down at the house: 'You're a glutton. You'll die of an indigestion,' he says; and a fine thing, I tell him, for a pauper to die of; but I shan't have got it in the Poorhouse—no!" She chuckled. "All the pork's eaten," she said, bending for a closer inspection. "You might as well let me finish the carrots before they get cold."

"There's almost enough left to do for to-morrow," began Vrouw Lobbers doubtfully.

"If you was to die, there'd be a vacancy," said Lobbers, pushing back his chair; "and who knows but we might get in Maria?"

"I won't take the bath," interrupted Maria.

Vrouw Lobbers pushed the pot across with sudden resolution. "Help yourself, Elizabeth, and welcome," she said. "You'd take the bath quick enough, Maria, if they put you into it."

"I wouldn't! I wouldn't!" reiterated the old creature with tremulous eagerness. "You wouldn't let 'em; would you, Dirk?"

"What a fuss!" said the grumpy brother. "Don't ye wash yer face and hands every morning? It's only like washing them a little lower down."

"It'd kill me!" cried Maria hysterically. "I never took a bath in my life. Dirk, you wouldn't let 'em bathe me as if I was a woman from the streets!"

"Oh, hold yer tongue about yer killings!" interposed Vrouw Lobbers unamiably. "Liza isn't dead yet."—"No," said Liza.—"And she's two years older'n you." After that nothing was heard for some time but the noise of Liza's greedy eating: then the mistress of the cottage crossed to a perfectly ordered cupboard and produced a bottle of gin and a bag of tobacco. She filled two bright little glasses for her

husband and Liza. The gin was an extra: during its consumption both purveyor and purchaser watched anxiously for some cause of recrimination or complaint.

When the last drop had been licked from her glass, Liza struggled to her feet. "I shall go and visit Greta, our cousin," she said, and then added, in a sudden impulse of malice—"As you wish it, I'll speak to her about dining there o' Sundays. She could easily give me a better dinner than yours for the money, and she wouldn't talk about wanting me dead!"

"*We* wish it!" exclaimed Vrouw Lobbers aghast. "Oh, the wickedness! And I that allowed you to clean out the dish!"

"I didn't say I'd decide nothing—not definite," replied the old pauper, pinning on her workhouse shawl. "But I'm sick o' being told every week that I eat too much. You want to make too big a profit out o' me, Jane. That's the truth. I don't mind you having the money as well as another—blood's blood—but twopence is twopence. And I've a right, as I may say, to my——"

"Don't yer say 'money's worth'!" cried Lobbers, with a bang of his fist on the table.

"La! at Cousin Greta's I could say what I

choose! I'll just go across to her and see what she thinks."

"I'll take yer across," said Maria. "Maybe, as it's Sunday, she'll give us some coffee." And the two old women wandered away down the populous village street.

Their sister-in-law remained watching them from her freshly whitewashed little house with the broad geraniums in the window—the cottage stands back by itself, beyond a sort of common: from it you could see the usual Sunday picture of animated repose—children in brilliant colours scrambling across the roadway, men with shiny shirt-sleeves loitering against green shutters, a medley group, beneath the lengthening shadows, playing at pitch-and-toss.

Vrouw Lobbers turned back into the dusky house. "Any man but you," she said, "'d be ashamed to have such sisters."

"Stepsister," corrected Lobbers, smoking viciously.

"'Tis all the same. I'm dead sick o' feeding 'em!"

"Liza pays her tuppence," said the man, "when she comes. O' Sundays."

"And what does Maria pay—Sundays or weekdays—whom we've had on our hands these fifteen years?"

"If Liza was to die," said the man, "we could get Maria into the Poorhouse. She wouldn't cost us anything. She'd pay her tuppence o' Sundays."

"Liza ain't a-thinking o' dying," said the woman, tidying up the things.

"You can die without thinking," replied Lobbers sententiously. "Some day some big morsel 'll stick in her throat."

"I wonder"—remarked the woman, pausing reflectively. Then she drew the gin bottle out of her husband's reach. The old man did not ask what she wondered.

"Such things do happen," continued Vrouw Lobbers, carefully considering. "When I was a girl, and in service, there was the cook's son, a charity boy, used to come o' Sunday evenings, and his mother'd give 'im a dinner. And one Sunday, after he'd eaten it—veal pudding it was and cold pastry—'Mother,' he says, 'what d'ye think I done afore I come away? Eaten all the other boys' porridge,' he says, 'twelve plates—as none o' the others 'd touch.'"

"There was fourteen plates," interrupted Lobbers, pulling at his pipe, "and he went home that night and his stomach burst. You've told me that story before, Jane. La!—not two Sundays goes by that

you don't tell the tale to Liza, not ten meals that you don't tell it to Maria."

"You're mighty quick in your 'rithmetic," spitefully retorted the woman. "Their appetites wouldn't so madden me as they do, could I fancy a morsel myself."

"There you're right," said the man with conviction. "I and you, we was always poor eaters. Cheap eaters we was. I often think what a lot we could save if it wasn't for Maria! She's wonderful hungry for one as does no work."

The woman came and sat down over against him: the smart little pink and white tablecloth spread between them, a blue vase stood upon it, with pretty blue flowers.

"You talk, but I reckon," she said.

"I know, Jane, you was always an excellent reckoner."

"I reckon, I tell ye. Down to a cent, and the half of a cent. I've got it all down on paper, every penny she cost us. Not that it's any use, for we shan't ever get back a brass farthing, but I can't help it: I was born that way; I must cipher and count. She costs us a florin a week, speaking roughly, more than we should need to spend if she wasn't there." Vrouw Lobbers got up again. "I'll give ye the

exact figures, she said, "I've got 'em in my copy-book."

"No," said the man, with an oath, "I don't want no figures. It's bad enough as it is, but it can't be helped."

"No, it can't be helped," she repeated, and picked a loose thread from the tablecloth. "At least," she added presently, "I suppose not."

He stared, with extended pipe. "What d'ye mean?" he said roughly.

"I wish it could be helped; that's all I mean. We should be very comfortable if it weren't for Maria."

"We can manage," he said, a little anxiously. "At any rate, at present."

"What do *you* mean?" she exclaimed, advancing her face across the table.

"I've always had my wages regular: that's all I mean. Six florins a week; 'tisn't much, but it's more than they always gives to a labourer. I shouldn't like if they was to give us less."

"Like?—it'd ruin us, I tell ye. You're no reckoner like me. I save and I slave all day long to keep things going. I can just do it with the money. Don't you bring home a penny less."

"I never did, Jane. I never was one o' that sort —no, not as a young man."

"Then don't you go talking nonsense about beginning now. I want every penny I can get to keep things going. D'ye hear?" She cast a proud look round her spotless cottage. "Only yesterday the minister's wife was in, and 'Vrouw Lobbers, there's not a neater dwelling than yours,' she says."

"I know, I know. You told us at dinner. And she's said it before."

"Said it before? I should think she had. She says it every time she comes."

At this stage, Maria crept meekly in.

"Well?" cried husband and wife together.

"Liza was taken bad," said Maria. "We *had* coffee at Cousin Greta's, and currant buns—Liza had two, and a cucumber. She was taken bad with a choke on her chest—so bad that they sent for the doctor." Maria sniffed.

"Well?" repeated husband and wife together, craning forward, the pair of them.

"'She'll kill herself some day with her greediness,' the doctor says."

"Bah!" exclaimed the husband, sinking back. "He's said that before."

"'She's got something wrong with her heart,' said the doctor: he was a long time bringing her

round. 'One such another attack, at her age, might kill her,' said the doctor."

"Ah!" said the wife.

* * * * *

And the week slipped quietly by. Nothing happened—as usual: the days were, as usual, monotonously full. Lobbers went to his regular work as a labourer in the Baron's woods; Vrouw Lobbers scrubbed and polished late and early; at night she sat down, spotless, and looked around her spotless home. Maria tried to help—to do as much work as was desired of her, continuously scolded, and mercifully resigned. Of evenings, when the man came home, things would grow cheerful: he would read aloud odds and ends from the newspaper, smoking while the women sewed.

The Saturday came round, on which he was always twenty minutes later—pay-time delaying him. Vrouw Lobbers watched at the door, till the minutes had lengthened beyond the half-hour; then she frowned and smoothed down her ample bosom, and sent off Maria to the Poorhouse to find out if Liza were better and could be expected to the Sunday dinner. For Liza had remained ailing all the week with what Maria called "chronicles in her inside." "It's a fit of indigestion," the doctor had answered,

when Vrouw Lobbers stopped him in the road; "she'll get over it and live for a year or two yet. But she mustn't have any more."

"Drat the man!" now said Vrouw Lobbers in equivalent Dutch. "If he's gone to the public-house —a thing he never did before—I shall give him more of my mind than he'll care for." But, even as she spoke, her husband turned the corner and came across the common with slow and uncertain step.

Uncertain also, Vrouw Lobbers waited till he lurched over a molehill: then she said decidedly— "He's drunk. Oh, the scandal in a respectable family! Five-and-forty years long have we never had a thing to be ashamed of. Alas! the day." She stood waiting, her arms akimbo: her husband passed her, as if unconscious of her presence: he went in and sat down.

"And this is the condition you come home in," began the housewife, "on a Saturday night! I don't know what's befallen you, Lobbers, that you should bring down disgrace on two people as never did anything as anyone ever could find fault with before!"

He looked up at her, not having heard, with dazed eyes.

"Well, get them copy-books," he said.

"What, in the name of mischief, do you mean?"

"Them copy-books, you know."

"*What* copy-books?"

"Them as you always write down all the housekeeping in. You ain't got no others. Let me see if I can't understand that two and two don't make five!"

"Why, you never wanted to see 'em before in your life. You're——"

"Never mind; I want to see 'em now. And look here, Jane, give me my pipe."

She went to the cupboard, wondering, not sure of his condition. But she brought the copy-books in silence and spread them out before him. There were two of them, fat and strongly stitched in so-called moleskin: during all her long married life she had neatly written down her accounts first in one, then in the other, carefully re-backing them when they fell to pieces from age.

He turned over a few pages, backwards and forwards, listlessly gazing at the close-written columns of figures: then his eyes grew dim. "I've never been able to make anything of sums," he said. "*You* tell me. But nobody could fell a tree quicker'n I. And now they say I can't!"

"Who says?" she exclaimed, erect and fierce.

"The Baron's agent. Jane, it's come at last.

I've been expecting it ever since the winter. I'm put on the 'old ones'' list, as they call it. I'm to have a florin less than till now."

"A florin less! I can't manage, I tell you! I can't manage!" She snatched at the copy-books and drew them towards her.

"Don't," he said. "'Tisn't my fault."

A sudden compunction seized her. "And I thought you was drunk!" she said.

He looked up reproachfully.

"For shame!" he answered. "You know I was never drunk in my life."

She turned over the pages hurriedly, confusing him with their glitter. "Look here," she said; "let me show you. I can't manage on less. Work it out with me. You must tell the agent. I *can't* keep things decent: the others don't want to. You and I, we're simple folk: we don't eat not more than a morsel, we don't drink not more than a sip of gin on Sundays, for you—but we *must* live clean and decent. We should die if we was turned out of this little cottage. La—a whole florin less! What we had was hardly enough to keep soul and body together!"

"I can't tell him. He won't care," said the man.

They sank into silence, their eyes on the books.

"I've never wasted a farthing on nothing," said

the woman at length, in the dusk; "not since we was married, five-and-forty years ago. The last money I ever wasted went in buying you a fairing, Dirk, when we was courting. I bought you a little red purse—d'ye remember?—to put y'r money in. It cost eighty cents—it had a very good clasp."

"I've got it still," said the man.

"In course you have. But I've always regretted it. People like us don't want no purse." She waited a long time. "All the same," she said reflectively, "I got it cheap."

"Where's Maria?" said the man, anxious to communicate the tidings of his trouble. The woman made answer—

"Maria, she costs us a florin a week."

"What's that to do with my question?"

"Maria? I tell you she costs us just a florin a week."

"Well, where is she?"

"Gone to ask about Liza's coming to-morrow. Liza's still poorly. Dirk, don't you hear me? Maria, she costs us exactly a florin a week."

"Hear? I should think so! I've heard it a dozen times. Go to h—— with your florin! She'll have to cost us less."

"Do you think she costs us more than she must? Not a cent!"

"Well, what then?"

"We shall have to get rid of Maria."

"We can't. They won't take her in the Poor-house, Jane—not while Liza's there."

"Don't I know that? Else she'd have been in ten years ago, I promise you."

"What then? We can't kill her."

The woman rose, indignant. "How dare you say such wickedness, Dirk? If anyone was to hear us you'd be shamed afore the village."

"I was only joking," he expostulated, with an awkward laugh.

"Joking! 'Tain't no subject for joking. Sakes alive, here's Maria!"

"Are you there, Maria?" began Lobbers immediately. "Something terrible has happened, you must be prepared for it. The agent——" Maria began to cry. "The agent has put me among the 'old ones.' I'm to have a florin less."

Maria laughed, a feeble, old woman's quaver. "I thought you was going to say 'turned off,'" she cried.

Her sister-in-law burst out at her in a fury. "Turned off!" she exclaimed; "you grinning fool!

And why should they turn him off, pray? D'ye think he's been accused of stealing, as you was in y'r last place but one?"

"It was a lie," protested the old spinster, with fresh tears. "It was proved to be a lie. They caught the thief."

"Lie or no lie, it might have been the truth," retorted Vrouw Lobbers, who had flung this libel in Maria's face a thousand times.

"She don't understand," interposed the old man. "Not earning her own bread, she don't mind how it's paid for. Look ye here, Maria, make sense of this: There's a florin less to spend every week in this family where there never was florins to spare. Jane and I can't eat less than we do, Maria."

"Nor I can't," said Maria, with a gulp.

"Well, you'll have to go and get fed somewhere else, then."

"You wouldn't send me away, Dirk. I ain't got no tuppences to go buying a dinner with."

"How *is* Liza?" queried Jane, looking up.

"Very poorly, the doctor says. She had some bad suffocations. But she's coming to-morrow—she told me to make sure and tell you. She's coming to-morrow, so you shouldn't think she was ill."

"Trust her to grudge us the tuppence," said

Lobbers. "She wouldn't pay for her dinner and not eat it—not she."

"Well, she's a right to it," said Vrouw Lobbers briskly. Her voice had resumed its cheery tone. She went and got a shawl and a basket. "I'm just stepping across to the High Street," she said. "As she's coming to-morrow, we must give her the dinner she pays us for. She shall have it, Dirk; she shall have it, Maria, and, as she's poorly, of the best. Saveloys is Liza's favourites: she shall have a saveloy. And cabbages and cucumbers was always her particular vegetables. She shall have a cabbage and a cucumber, Maria; she shall have a cucumber and she shall have a cabbage, Dirk."

It was late when she returned and triumphantly displayed her purchases. The frugal supper did not take long to get ready: they partook of it, and a chapter in Chronicles closed the day. After Jane had kissed and comforted her husband, she lay awake for a long time, doing interminable, unreasonable sums. When, at last, she fell asleep, she dreamed she had the nightmare from over-eating. She woke, tired and flurried. She felt glad the morning was Sunday. Maria cooked the coffee; there was nothing to be done but to sally forth leisurely to church. Jane tied her husband's broad

black bow for him, as she had always done these five-and-forty years. In church she looked so neat and "bonnie," with her big black bonnet and big white curls, the minister's wife could not keep back an approving nod. She listened intently all through the sermon: perhaps the minister's wife would not have smiled so kindly had she known that Vrouw Lobbers did not think much of the minister's easy theology. "He's always talking of love," said Vrouw Lobbers, with unconcealed scorn.

After church the old couple waited for Liza, and took her along with them. They listened almost in silence to the poor creature's querulous complaints.

"Yes, I'm coming," said Liza eagerly. "'If I'm well enough to go to church,' I says to the matron (which I'm not), 'I'm well enough to go and get a better dinner than the Poorhouse 'll supply.' Not that *your* dinners are anything to boast of at the price, Jane, but the doctor, he's been giving me chicken-broth without any chicken for a week."

At this stage they came across the doctor. "Now, mind you," he said, stopping, "don't you go and eat anything indigestible, Eliza. I won't answer for the consequences if you do. Vrouw Lobbers, see that she's careful."

"Yes, sir, certainly, all I can," replied Vrouw Lobbers, with a curtsey. And as the doctor passed on his way, "You heard him," she said to her sister-in-law.

"I shall eat what I choose," snapped Liza.

Vrouw Lobbers called after the doctor—

"She won't listen to you, sir: how'll she listen to me?" cried Vrouw Lobbers. "It ain't my fault, sir, whatever she does. Mark my words; it ain't no fault o' mine."

"Let her kill herself, if she chooses," the doctor cried back in a rage.

Vrouw Lobbers repeated these words to herself, half aloud. She repeated them twice over. Liza grinned.

"Better go home and have your broth," said Dirk suddenly.

"So that *you* should eat the dinner I paid for!" burst out his stepsister. "Give me back my tuppence, then."

"I will," said Dirk.

Both women stared.

"You'd better be saving of your tuppences," sneered Liza. "You'll have fewer of them than ever, I'm told."

"Who told you?"

"Never you mind. It's all over the place. You're shelved among the old ones."

"We should be able to get along all the same if it wasn't for Maria and you."

"Me?—me——?"

"Hold your tongue, Dirk, and don't say such wicked things," interposed his wife. "And come in to your dinner, Liza, and thank your stars we can give it you as good."

So they sat down to the midday meal, the four of them, tottery, clean-clothed, blear-eyed, to the Sunday midday meal. They again grew very silent. Maria put down the food.

"A saveloy!" exclaimed old Liza. "Now I take that kindly of you, Jane! My favourite dish, of all things! That's better than Poorhouse broth!"

"Don't you eat of it," said the man, suddenly laying down his knife and fork. "Remember what the doctor told you."

"No, don't you eat of it!" eagerly echoed the wife. Her fingers twitched: there were two white spots on the hard red of her fresh-coloured old face.

"No, don't," repeated Maria.

"So there should be more for you—eh?" an-

swered Liza, looking from one to the other. "I to pay—and you to eat?"

"D'ye think tuppence pays for saveloys, you old pauper?" screamed the sister-in-law; but immediately her voice dropped: "I bought it a-purpose for you," she said. "I don't fancy such things. Eat the whole of it if you like: that'll please us."

"I don't believe you, but I will," replied Liza, her mouth full. And so they ate in silence: certainly Vrouw Lobbers had but little appetite: she sat staring at her woe-begone husband: the two sisters consumed as much as they could get.

"Don't you touch the cucumber, Maria," interposed Vrouw Lobbers. "I got it on purpose for Liza."

"Wait till you can pay, Maria," said Liza; but she helped her sister to a few slices as she spoke.

"I shall never be able to pay," said Maria.

"Yes, you will when I'm dead, and they get you into the Poorhouse." Vrouw Lobbers started, despite her self-control. "But I don't intend to give them a chance yet awhile."

"Have some cabbage, Liza?" said Vrouw Lobbers.

"So I shall; but I'll take my own time about it, as I shall about dying. One'd think you *want* me to over-eat myself."

Vrouw Lobbers pushed forward what was left of the saveloy.

"They couldn't get me in. I wouldn't take the bath," said Maria.

Vrouw Lobbers smiled.

"Hold your tongue, Maria, do!" cried her brother —almost kindly.

Liza threw down her fork and knife with a clatter. "Well, it's been a banquet!" she said. "A banquet! Jane, if you get the gin, I shall drink your health. Here, get an extra glass for yourself. I'll stand you a sup to drink my health in return with."

"You know I never drink gin," said Jane.

"No; you're a fine lady, you are. But you'll not refuse to drink my health?"

"Yes, I will," said Jane, with downcast eyes.

"It's an ungracious action. Never mind. Here goes yours! You always was an ungracious creature, but I dare say you means well."

Vrouw Lobbers did not answer.

"She means well, I suppose, Dirk, doesn't she?" continued Liza, with a laugh.

"In course she means well," said Dirk suddenly.

The old woman rose to her feet with a gasp. "I'm going back to the house," she said; "I certainly

don't feel comfortable. There's this suffocation coming on again. But I've had a good time, and I thank you kindly, Jane."

She tottered out. Maria would have followed, but Jane imperiously motioned her back. The three in the cottage settled down to their several thoughts. The man smoked; Maria dozed; Jane sat with an open Bible on her lap, or occasionally got up and paced the floor.

It was dusk before the doctor burst into the room, his face inflamed.

"What have you been giving that woman to eat?" he exclaimed. "It's killed her."

"Doctor, it's no fault of ours," replied Vrouw Lobbers, in great agitation. "She *would* share our dinner; we hadn't thought she was a-coming. You heard her; you heard her yourself, doctor; it's no fault of ours!"

"I didn't say it was," retorted the doctor testily. "Well, she's done it, as I always said she would."

Maria burst out into noisy crying. "I won't go to the Poorhouse," she sobbed. "I won't, I won't! I won't take the bath!"

The doctor gazed at her open-eyed.

"Hold your tongue, Maria, will you? And before the doctor, too!" cried Vrouw Lobbers. Then she

turned to that gentleman. "Don't mind her, please, sir; she's a little—you understand. But that doesn't matter for the Poorhouse, does it, sir? So many of them are. She's down next in the list, sir, and we recommend her for the vacancy. Dirk—*hold* your tongue, Maria!—say we recommend her for the vacancy!"

"We recommend her for the vacancy," said Dirk.

"SILLY."

"SILLY."

SILLY sat gazing away into the sea. That was his usual manner of spending the empty mornings, the empty afternoons. Unless his mother called him back to do some work for her, which was unusual, for Silly did things wrong.

The fifteen years of his lonely life were like a placid, shallow, stagnant water, over which, at constant intervals, swept, from daybreak until evening, the storms of his mother's rages, his brothers' and sisters' teasings and taunts. His father was good to him: sometimes, when his mother beat him, his father would bid her leave off.

He would creep out of the cottage, as often as he could, away among the sand-dunes. He would linger there for hours, and, if unmolested, he would drift away still farther, to the shore.

"Silly, what are you doing?"

"Nothing, mother."

"Then leave off at once, and come here."

Sometimes he would obey, sometimes not. If not, he would run away farther, into the sand-dunes, and she would beat him, late at night, when he came back. If he went to her at once, she had forgotten, as often as not, for what reason she had called him: if she remembered, and set him a task, he would make a mess of it, and then, probably, she would beat him for that. She was hard-working herself, a poor fisherman's wife with many children and many trials: for ten long years she had been angry with God and with Silly, that her eldest child should have proved an impracticable fool.

And when she saw her sister's boy of twelve go out with his father to the fishing, she hated Silly. On the day when that first took place, and they had extra coffee and buns, with gin for the men, at the sister's house, she broke out angrily, and would not allow Silly to take his bun like the rest.

"Put it down," she said.

He looked at her, hesitating, disinclined to obey.

"Put it down," she said again, with a stamp of her foot.

Then he did as he was told, and went and sat among the other children, bunless.

In the evening, when the shadows were falling

and the noise of life was stilled, perhaps she somewhat repented—perhaps she thought of her nephew away among the dangers of the deep: she looked kindly at her eldest born, and made as if she would have kissed him, but amongst her sort there was little kissing of big children, and so she refrained, ashamed. But she gave him a penny to buy sweets with. Next morning, however, Silly had dropped the penny, and she boxed his ears.

There was considerable excuse for Silly's mother if she failed in tenderness to her eldest son. Had she kissed him, he would probably not have understood—perhaps, if he had understood, he would hardly have cared. The most manifest fact about this clouded nature was that he "didn't notice things," as averse to being petted as he was to being whipped. In truth, he had not sufficient experience of kindly treatment: slow intellects like his require more than a passing impression, and in the haphazard education of the poor a certain quickness is needed for a child to discover that his parents are fond of him. Silly never discovered or thought out anything beyond the immediate gratifications of the simplest animal tastes. He cared about getting sufficient food, if possible, and basking in the sunlight or near the winter fire.

And thus he would lie for hours and hours, beyond farthest reach of his mother's calling, on the sands, in the golden sunlight, gazing out towards the sea.

* * * * *

In the Château, a mile inward, among the spreading beeches, sat the young Countess through the morning, with her hands upon her lap.

"I am good for nothing," said the Countess.

Her courtly adviser looked half-reproachful sympathy from the depths of his kindly grey eyes. He was an English gentleman of high position, a well-known and righteously honoured philanthropist: he had been staying for a few days with the young Countess's parents: the forlornness of her lot had struck him. She was nearly thirty: she was not yet married, nor likely to find a husband; she sat in the weary pomp of her upbringing, and the gilded days —of which she never perceived the gilding—passed motionless, if such a thing can be.

"Nobody," said the philanthropist, bending forward, "ever was good for nothing yet. I don't say there have never been people who never found out what especial thing they were good for—though such cases, I should hope, are rare; but there certainly

never has been a creature of God's creation that was good for nothing at all."

"Not even snakes?" inquired the young Countess.

"Not even snakes," replied the philanthropist, who trusted his theory to pull him through, though he inwardly despaired of his zoology.

"What use are snakes?" said the Countess.

"Snakes are—are—my dear young lady, they eat a lot of other harmful animals——"

"What use are *they?*" interrupted the Countess; but he pretended not to hear her, hurrying on:

"And very many-er-charming objects are manufactured out of their beautiful skins—such as-er-purses, and—pocket-books——"

"Ah, yes," said the young Countess, with sudden feeling, "some creatures have, indeed, only one use: to die!"

Her pale blue eyes, that wandered across the park, filled with silent tears. He fancied her maudlin; he was far from guessing the hidden sadness of her words. A large sum of money had been left her, under trusteeship, some years ago by an aunt: her father wanted the money; she knew it.

"Our duty is to live," he said, with slight impatience, "and to glorify God."

"But what can I do? I can do nothing," said the Countess.

The distinguished philanthropist had never heard of Lady Clara Vere de Vere, but he asked the annoying young person beside him whether there were no poor about her gates.

"Poor? Oh, yes, but the minister's wife looks after them, and tells mamma of any case that's especially bad. I should be afraid to speak to poor people."

"Then you have thought over the matter? You feel it would be your duty?"

"Everybody does nowadays, don't they? It is in the air."

"I wish it were!"

"Oh, not the doing good! The feeling that we ought to."

"But if we discern our duty——"

"Although we perfectly well know we can't."

"Scratch my head," said the parrot. For there was a parrot in the room, and the philanthropist wished there wasn't. Last night, in the middle of the drawing-room meeting, having been reinstated by some mischievous nephew, he had spoilt an elo-

quent bit of special pleading by ejaculating "Humbug!" in that tone of deep conviction which parrots assume.

The young Countess laughed, and, rising, obeyed her favourite's behest. "When I die," she said, "that is to be my epitaph—my Cousin Frank has promised me—'Here lies one who never refused to scratch her parrot's head!'"

The philanthropist smiled, and shook his finger at her.

"Admit at least that it shows a kindly disposition. Peter is the single creature I am not afraid to speak to, the single creature I know who is not cleverer than I."

"And you have repeatedly told me that you thought him *very* clever."

"He is clever with my cleverness: so I can compare. He has no initiative, but he can do as he is told."

"Well, we came across a boy on the sands yesterday when I was out walking with your mother—a rather nice-looking boy of about fifteen, with a gentle, foolish face. Your mother said he was silly."

"Yes, that is his name."

"His name! Poor chap! Well, now, my dear young lady, do as you are told. Your mother in-

formed me that nobody had ever tried to make anything of 'Silly.' His own parents ignore or ill-treat him; the schoolmaster says, 'I have no time for imbeciles;' the minister says, 'I have no time for irresponsibles.' Is my information correct?"

"Undoubtedly; you have it from my mother."

"Then here is an opportunity. You have time."

"For imbeciles? One has to."

He looked at her anxiously, for he was as humble as he was kind-hearted and shrewd. "Surely you could go and talk to this boy," he said, "and make him ever so little happier and wiser and better than he is."

"I? Do you take me for a magician?"

"How so?"

"I could make him—momentarily—happier by giving him a penny; all the unhappier, afterwards, were his mother to take it away. But 'better,' 'wiser!' Shall the blind lead the blind?"

He waited a moment, looking away. Then he said slowly—"Yes, the one who can open her eyes shall lead the one who cannot. My dear young lady, I have no intention of preaching to you, but at least, if you can do nothing else, you can teach him the one thing you declare yourself to be clever in. Teach him to do as he is told: a most useful thing for one

of his mental capacity. His mother, whom we visited, deplored that he was often exceedingly refractory. Here is a mission for you."

"But——"

"I do not think you are as clever in the one thing you are clever in as you imagine yourself to be."

She laughed. "You have me there. I must either prove myself mistaken or obey. I obey, but the consequences be upon your head."

"I accept them. Would that I could always accept consequences as gladly!"

She went out, still laughing; and he, watching from the window, saw her cross the court.

"Humbug! Scratch my head," said the parrot.

He turned abruptly, walked across to the beast, and scratched.

"I think you are wrong," he said to the bowing parrot. "I don't think it's *all* humbug. You see, I've devoted my whole life to it; but, of course, one can never be quite sure."

At that moment the old Countess came in. She was not really old, but middle-aged and comfortable-looking. "What! Have you forgiven Polly?" she said, laughing, for her tact was of the kind peculiar to countesses.

He answered gravely—"I am earning an epitaph."

"I see. You have been enjoying Hilda. She is really a good girl, much cleverer and kinder than you might think——"

"You give me credit for little discernment," he interrupted.

"But she has been brought up among views widely different from yours. Her father always tells her that the only use of the peasants is for shooting."

"For shooting!"

"Not for being shot, of course. You understand as well as I do."

"Meanwhile, Miss Hilda has gone out to make friends with Silly."

The Countess sat down. "The great difficulty," she said, sighing heavily, "with a creature like that is to find him a fixed occupation. Were he to earn something, however little, I believe his mother might be made to grow fond of him. Do you like shrimps?"

"Very much. I like all good things. What connexion have they to your idiot?"

"None at all. I came in to ask; there is a man with them in the kitchen—a rare opportunity; it is so seldom we can get fish near the sea! You shall have an *omelette aux crevettes* for lunch."

"But I thought the people were fishermen?"

"So they are, but they have contracts with big firms, and everything is sent off to the city."

"Well, then, here is a small beginning for your *protegé*. Surely he might learn a little shrimp-catching; it is work for old men and children."

"An excellent idea. I must speak to his mother about it."

"I am going for a stroll by the sea before lunch. If I meet Mademoiselle Hilda, I will tell her."

"Oh, blessed omelet!" laughed the Countess.

Meanwhile, Hilda walked with lagging steps along the wide sea-shore. She enjoyed the sunlit day, the far expanse of sand and ocean; she did not enjoy the prospect of Silly somewhere at the end. She had always felt an instinctive dread of mental derangement; had avoided the harmless simpleton, who avoided everyone else.

"I have brought it on myself," she thought. "I must keep up my reputation for the only virtue I pretend to possess." She was very fond of the English guest, an old friend of her mother's. "I do not think he does any positive harm," said the Count.

Silly sat on a sand-dune at no great distance from the village, for his mother had told him to "clear out" that morning; so he felt comparatively safe. He saw the young Countess coming, but did not run

away from her, as the last thing he would have considered likely was that she should address him. His world did not include her—it included barely half a dozen human beings—but he touched his cap, as did everyone, as she passed.

"Good morning," said the Countess, and, to their common perturbation, she sat down.

Silly did not answer, being too shy.

"What a fine morning it is!" presently continued the Countess; this remark Silly considered exceedingly foolish.

The Countess dug deep down into her intelligence. "What is your favourite amusement?" she began, following the rules she had learnt for conversation.

"No," replied Silly, meaning he had none, or couldn't understand, or think it out. "Have you?"

"Philanthropy," answered Hilda promptly. "If you had a little toy boat you could sail it on the sea."

"Jan's on the sea. I mayn't," said Silly.

"Who is Jan?"

"Jan's Jan, Aunt Mary's son. He's littler'n me."

"Are you fond of Jan?"

"No. He hits me. But I'm stronger'n him."

"Then why don't you hit back?" queried Hilda curiously, rather forgetting her mission.

"'Cos I'm stronger. 'Twouldn't be fair."

"Dear me!" She was thoughtful for a moment. "That doesn't sound a bit like other boys."

"Mother says I'm not like other boys. I'm silly."

"True," said Hilda, thinking aloud. "If you weren't silly, you'd only hit what was weaker than you."

"I'll remember that," said Silly.

Then she realised that she was making a mess of things.

"My dear boy," she explained, "you mustn't mind what I say. You don't understand."

Silly got up. "I'm going," he said.

"Where to?"

He pointed to a neighbouring dune.

"I'll come with you," said Hilda.

The boy sat down again. "That's what I was going for," he said.

She coloured violently. "But," she protested, "I —I want to do something for you. Is there nothing I could do? I—I am the Countess Hilda, you know. Is there nothing you would like?"

"No," he said. "Yes. Scratch my back."

The Countess recoiled. "You can do that for yourself," she said.

"No, I can't," he said obstinately. "I can't reach to it."

"Everybody can. Try."

Again he prepared to slouch off. The image of the Englishman rose before her—she seemed to see his smile.

"Sit down!" she said desperately. "I'll rub your back if you'll listen to what I've got to say."

So she moved her gloved hand to and fro across his jacket, while she preached him a brief little homily about being gentle and good and kind. He did not understand two words of it. But when she stopped for a moment—the rubbing, not the talking —he said, "Go on."

"If you was my mother would you be good to me?" he interrupted suddenly, that consideration having penetrated his sluggish brain.

Now had she said "No," what had become of her homily? So she said "Yes."

"You wouldn't have beaten me?"

"N-no," she replied, feeling disloyal.

"I should like to come and live with you."

She sat silent in the face of this emergency.

"But your mother doesn't beat you when you're good," she began feebly. "That's why, as I was saying, you should always be obedient and good."

"She beats me 'cos I'm not clever," he answered sullenly. "Are *you* clever?"

"No," she answered promptly. "But, of course, I know a great many things you don't."

"Do ye?" he said doubtingly. "I know a great many things nobody knows. I know them all myself."

"What sort of things?"

"About the sea, and the birds, and the creeping things. They come and tell me. Mother knows nothing about 'em. She says the sea's just the sea. And she wants to teach me to do a lot o' things I can't do. And they say I'm stupid."

"You poor fellow!" exclaimed Hilda, with tears in her eyes.

He glanced up quickly, saw them, and from that moment his whole expression changed.

"You must try and do what she tells you," continued the Countess. "People like you and me, who are not particularly clever about managing things for ourselves, cannot do better than just simply leave others to arrange everything for us."

"I don't understand," said Silly, with clouded brow.

"When you don't know what to do, do just what you're told to do. You understand that?"

"P'raps."

"You'll be much happier. You know *you* cannot find out for yourself, S——" She checked the word.

"D'ye mean to say I must do whatever she tells me?"

"Yes."

"Whew! Well, nobody spoke ever to me like you before; it sounds nice. P'raps I'll try."

"Do. Come, shall we walk home together?" She got up from the sandhill; together they strolled along the beach. He picked up a couple of shells and gave them her, common shells, such as anyone might pick up, and none but a child or a fool would keep.

"Good-bye," she said, stopping, when the cottages were a few yards off.

"Why don't you call me by my name, please?" was his unexpected reply.

"Because I don't know it," she answered uncomfortably.

"Why, it's 'Silly.' You know, it's 'Silly.'"

She coloured again. "Good-bye, Silly," she said, and held out her hand, which he took awkwardly.

"Remember," she said, "and if you don't want

to do what she tells you, ask God to make you want."

"P'raps." He was slouching off, when the Englishman came round the corner.

"I have been looking for you," said the Englishman. "I have an idea for this poor boy. He is to learn shrimp-catching, an easy work. Let us go and tell his mother."

So they went, and the mother was delighted at any chance of the lad's earning a trifle. Silly, too, was delighted—naturally—for the highest aspiration of his life was to get nearer than possible to the sea.

* * * * *

In the evening, an hour before sundown, he started, accompanied by his younger cousin Jan. All the afternoon the pair had been busy with an old shrimp-catcher who lived near them, learning; and, though Silly still felt shaky, Jan had fully mastered the very simple trick. A net had been borrowed, and, attired in the old shrimper's oilskin bags, a sadly comic figure, Silly now sallied forth.

"Mind you don't make a fool of yourself," said his mother. "Do what Jan tells you, mind."

"I mind."

"I must go out to-night with father," said Jan importantly.

"You have plenty of time to go with Silly first. You can have a penny of what he earns," said the mother, going in.

So they trudged along the sands, to a far-away spot where no one would disturb them, and Silly went into the water, triumphantly pushing the net in front of him. It was the happiest moment of his life.

Jan directed him from the shore with much superfluous superiority, and he drove his net along in the calm grey water, under the fading light. But they caught no shrimps.

After a time the interest began to pall. "I'll tell you what," cried Jan from the shore. "I'll just run home and get things ready. You stop here till I come back, mind."

"In the water?" cried Silly. "P'raps."

"Mind you do. I'll only be a minute. Didn't your mother say you was to do exactly as I said? If you stir I'll tell her, and she'll lick you."

"I don't mind that!" cried Silly.

"All you've got to do is to stay and catch 'em!" shouted Jan, most mindful of his penny.

"How am I to catch them? I wish I could!"

"Go in farther, you fool!" cried Jan, running off.

At his own door his father waylaid him, and,

heedless of his familiar protests, sent him a mile away for some particular gin.

But Silly propelled his net through the darkening water, catching nothing.

A visitor to the village inn passed on his homeward way. He knew the boy was a simpleton, and the simpletons of this world are fair game, always.

"What are you doing there?" he questioned.

"Catching shrimps," came the answer.

"How many have you caught?"

"None."

The stranger laughed. "You don't know how to catch 'em," he said, and then an idea struck him. "You don't know what to say."

"Say?"

"Say, of course. The shrimps won't come unless you call 'em. Every fisherman knows that. You must sing, so that they hear you——

> "'Shrimp, shrimp, come and feed,
> God grant me all my need!'"

"Old Kobus never told me!"

"Then old Kobus, whoever he is, is a fool."

"But there isn't any food in the net."

"Never mind; do you know your song?"

"No."

And the stranger had to repeat it several times before Silly pretended to have learnt it. Then the stranger, in the twilight, laughed his way home.

Silly went on, pushing his net, and singing. What he sang was—

"Shrimp—shrimp—all my need!"

for that was all he remembered. It grew slowly dark, and the water was very cold. He got sick of the weary labour, and pushed his way towards the shore.

Then, suddenly, the Countess Hilda's words of that morning blazed up in his mind. They were the only kind words that had ever been spoken to him by a stranger. He must always obey his mother, and his mother—or Jan in his mother's name—had ordered him to stay. He must obey Jan. He went back into the chilling water. He was very unwilling to do it, but again he remembered the Countess' words, and he said, "God, make me want!" The stars came out. The long line of coast grew dim. The rippling waves crept forward as the tide began to turn. He pushed his net in front of him, the unwieldy oilskins clinging in lumps about his limbs. And he sang, in a weary, hesitating chant, "Shrimp —shrimp—all I need."

At the Château, in the cheerful dining-room, all lights and laughter, the young Countess Hilda smiled upon the grave philanthropist. "I am so thankful to you," she said, with sparkling eyes. "You have done a good work to-day. I feel very happy whenever I think of that poor boy: after all, you are right; there is nobody good for nothing."

In the rising water, deadly cold, with blackness all around him, but for half a dozen watching stars, so high above, Silly pushed his empty net and sang his empty song. Sometimes he sang it low, for weariness; sometimes, when the thought of the Countess came upon him, he sang it loud, for hope. He was doing what she wished him to do. The water was all about him: it was very cold and dark and horrible—he was very frightened. But then he was only silly, and couldn't manage things—or understand. He must wait till Jan came back, and do as he was told—obey.

The water was at his throat. He stopped pushing and singing.

"Shrimp—shrimp—all I need!" And a great wave from God arose on the breast of the waters and swept over them, into stillness and peace.

For He heareth prayer.

THE MINISTER'S DOG.

THE MINISTER'S DOG.

I.

THE minister stood alone beneath the falling shadows, a black speck on the long white length of lonely dyke. Before him, where the wide water had swelled bravely to greet him on his first coming to this his first charge three months ago—before him now lay the dead ice-crust, grey and still, with the still grey pall spread motionless above it, grey on grey, stillness on stillness, by the long gleam of the snow-stilled dyke.

The minister sighed, and then coughed hastily, ashamed, to himself, of the sigh. Earth and sky were very big and very empty. The minister was very young.

He was returning, with laggard step, from the steam-boat station, whither he had just escorted his mother. The mother is a pastor's widow, away in Amsterdam, vainly striving, amid the claims of five

young children, to join two inelastic ends. After a Christmas-tree at home, sparsely hung, but love-lit and love-laden, she had hurried across to spend the last day of the festival with her wistful eldest. She had brought a cake and compound affection, compressed—like Liebig.

He was a three-months' minister. He had ideals. She had listened patiently to all his complainings, and she had not told him more than once that he was young and must learn. But she had resolutely steered his thoughts towards the sunshine, and had dilated on the lights and shadows of the other children's complicated existence, especially the lights.

The minister's brothers and sisters are of no interest to anyone, excepting to themselves, and their mother, and the minister.

"I have brought you a present from the children," said the colourless little woman, rapidly passing in review the minister's scanty wardrobe. "It will come up this evening from the boat station to comfort you when I am gone."

The minister muttered the word "extravagance," and began to inquire all over again concerning Adrian, the youngest, who had hip disease, and whose Christmas present, of late years, had been an expensive

visit to a Leyden professor, the painful probing of a wound.

"But this time he says it is doing splendidly," explained the little mother, beaming. "In a year or two, he says, there will only be a little lameness left."

"He will never be able to run with Nero," said the minister.

Nero was a black retriever, saved from drowning, as a pup, by the minister's sudden leap into the water—he was a student in those days—and given by him to the invalid, whom everybody petted.

"He doesn't want to run with Nero," replied the mother shortly.

The minister turned along the dyke. That morning he had preached his first Christmas sermon. It had been all about peace and goodwill.

He was thinking, as he walked, of the squabbles and struggles that filled the little fishing village from end to end. Three months ago he would have deemed it impossible that so much envy, jealousy, and malice could be contained in a community of twelve hundred souls, including women and children.

Oh, undoubtedly, including the women!

He reflected, as his black feet went crunching

the calm snow. There were the two Doyerfeld families, well-to-do, important, all-pervading, who had never exchanged a word since, five-and-twenty years ago, John Doyerfeld had struck his nephew for some boyish freak. They were religious people, all of them, communicants. White-haired Pete Doyerfeld glowered at white-haired John Doyerfeld across the holy table. The quarrel was the interest and the pride of their lives.

There was the baker, Jan Blass, whose weights had been found wanting, and who, therefore, made unresting war on the assizer; there were the Hockmans, who only hated their neighbours (four deep), and the Bartels, who hated everybody indiscriminately. There were all the members of the parish council, at daggers' ends about a question of tenpenny perquisites; there was the exciseman, near the church, who restricted his animosity to church-goers, because of a vainly-contested right of way.

Amongst all these dissentients the minister had stumbled blindly. At first he had foolishly believed himself merely a spectator, till suddenly he discovered that he was exchanging blows with the whole lot of them.

Jan Blass had refused to attend church again, after the very first Sunday, because the new minister

had "spoken slightingly of The Blood;" Teerling, the great smuggling contractor, had withdrawn his subscription to the Poor Fund because one of the Doyerfelds, and not Teerling's son, had been elected deacon; and the old widow of Claus Hockman, that most evil-tongued of old widows, had publicly rated the "Dominie" for declaring from the pulpit that "all men may obtain salvation," thereby "making God Almighty a puppet at every sinner's beck and call."

The Dominie sighed again, and this time he forgot to cough. He was passing a trim little green-shuttered house on the outskirts of the straggling village. He hesitated.

"I shall venture this very day!" he said, half aloud. "What a coward I am! And they can't make me feel more miserable than I do."

He walked up the narrow path, between some brown rhododendron bushes, and rang the bell—an inhospitable, irresponsively shrill little ting. It was answered immediately by a female, all angles, like a vinegar cruet well filled.

"Miss Kezia Vandonderboom?" said the Dominie.

"That is my name," replied the spinster sharply, "unless you have some serious objection. It seems to me as good as any other."

Long ago the then youthful Miss Kezia had sought refuge in defiance from incessant ridicule.

The naming of his daughters had been the one stroke of humour in Jaap Vandonderboom's long hen-pecked existence. After seven years of married life twin girls had been born to this patient Job. He came back from the registrar's to his wife's bedside.

"Well?" said the wife.

"Well?" said Jaap. "I haven't given 'em the names we agreed on. I told 'im to call 'em Jemima and Kezia—I told 'im."

The wife sat up.

"Well, of all the fools!" she cried in a faint fury. "But, fool as you are, I don't, for the life o' me, understand."

The long-suffering husband grinned.

"No more do I," he responded, "but the registrar did."

"May I come in?" asked the Dominie.

"Oh, if you want to," said Miss Kezia, "of course."

In the parlour, by a close stove, sat Miss Jemima. She was exactly like Miss Kezia, except that, being

paralysed, she always sat, while Miss Kezia, being energetic, mostly stood.

"I wanted to speak about that pew," began the young minister, after the perfunctory preliminaries.

Miss Kezia stopped him with uplifted finger by her sister's chair.

"Then you needn't," she said, "for it's no use, young man. We shall keep those two sittings till we die."

"But you know how matters stand," pleaded the Dominie. "Isaac Bartel and his wife have stayed away from service since last Easter, because their two children, that were then confirmed, can't sit in the same pew with them. There's not another vacant in the building, and your two seats adjoining theirs have not been occupied for years."

The Dominie paused; it sounded so simple, so logical.

"We shall keep those sittings till we die," said Miss Kezia. Miss Jemima nodded.

"And *never* come to church again?" questioned the Dominie, losing strength.

"My sister Jemima can't come, for she's paralysed," responded Miss Kezia, with asperity. "And I can't come because you preach Arminianism. Je-

mima 'd come fast enough if she could. She's Arminian."

"It sounds very contrary," said the Dominie plaintively.

Miss Jemima intervened. "A body can't help that," said Miss Jemima. "God Almighty's ways aren't our ways. We've always been 'contraried' about our church sittings. At Wyk, where we lived before we came here, there were two ministers that preached alternate, and one was Arminian, and one was pretty well orthodox. We could only afford one sitting then, and we took it in turns. The very first Sunday we drew lots, and Kezia got first turn, and —would you believe it?—bless me if the Arminian didn't get up and preach!"

"How did you manage?" asked the Dominie, with sudden interest, his eyes a-twinkle.

"Never went to church, of course, for seven months and more, till the orthodox man had a cold in his head one Sunday, and so the turns came right."

"But surely you might have exchanged," expostulated the Dominie.

"A turn's a turn," interposed Kezia; "and hadn't we drawn lots? God Almighty's ways aren't our ways. But you won't get those two sittings from us,

not if you talk till doomsday. We keep those two sittings, Jemima and I, till we exchange them for seats up above!" She pointed with corkscrew finger.

"I do believe you think there's some connexion!" cried the Dominie, aghast.

"I don't say that. You can make a dumb book say what it don't, Dominie, but you can't a living woman. We keep our seats in church, Jemima and I; we're not heathens nor Jews, but baptised and church-member Christians, and as much as that we *can* say, with the sittings to prove it, when our day of reckoning comes!"

The Dominie rose, rather violently.

"Three florins per sitting," chimed in Miss Jemima. "Six florins per annum, paid punctually for seventeen years come next January. One hundred and two florins, and nothing to show for it. That's all I say about it. I don't go no further. What a mint of money, and nothing to show for it—on earth!"

"Isaac Bartel's empty seats to show for it!" cried the minister. "I'm not defending Bartel's behaviour. All I say is: It is impossible but that occasions of stumbling should come. But woe unto him through whom they come!"

"Yes; but that was addressed to the shepherds, not to the sheep," cried Miss Kezia, as she followed

her pastor out into the hall. "And a very solemn warning it is to all ministers, Dominie. You're exceedingly young; but one day you'll say to yourself with tears (God grant it!): 'Woe unto him through whom offences come!'"

The Dominie hurried homewards. Over the darkening landscape damp mists fell cold. He shivered as he passed the hovel of Bram Stap, the cobbler, the village terror, from which echoed the shouts and oaths of a drunken brawl. And as he passed the respectable white house of respectable white-haired John Doyerfeld he shivered again.

In this village, according to immemorial custom, the church bell was rung at intervals throughout the Feast of the Nativity. He listened to it now. "Peace and goodwill," he said; "Peace and goodwill. Well, I can't help it." From the distance the parsonage twinkled across the snow. It was utterly, miserably empty.

At the door his one servant stood peering anxiously out. His mother had recently procured this person for him. It was the person's duty to be old, unattractive, self-willed, and absolutely trustworthy. She did her duty.

"Dominie! Dominie!" she cried shrilly from the step. "There's the most terrible creature arrived for

you, done up in a basket! And if it's your mother that sent it, as the boatman was saying—Lord, one can't understand such goings on of so sensible-seeming a creature!"

The Dominie pushed past.

"I've been out a-perishing with cold for the last hour and a half!" continued the old lady behind him. "I couldn't 'a' ventured to stay in the house with it, for fear it should break loose. And to listen to its howlings and moanings is enough to make a body's blood turn black."

"The drugget looks strong enough," said the Dominie calmly. "You must be unusually nervous about animals, Mina." He stood in the passage, under the oil-lamp, looking upon the big basket securely covered with cloth. Scarcely had he begun to speak when the howlings ceased, and the basket heaved to and fro in a series of ungainly jumps and tossings.

"Get me a knife, please," said the Dominie. He took up an envelope addressed in his brother Adrian's boyish sprawl, and broke the seal.

"Dear brother," said the letter, "we send you 'Nero.' We don't want him, for we're plenty company among ourselves. Besides, we couldn't keep him anyway, for there's a new dog tax to be levied

next year of five florins, so mother says we should have to sell him anyway."

The letter, in the lame boy's writing, was signed by the whole family.

"Wait, Dominie, please, till I've locked myself into the kitchen," expostulated Mina, as her master began to cut the string.

He obediently hesitated, but a moment later, in the expectant silence of the narrow passage, as the drugget fell aside, the great silken mass of the black retriever poured forth in a sudden leap, all over the Dominie, upsetting him on to the floor and overflowing him, neck and shoulders, under a torrent of embraces and the constantly recurring flashes of a bright red tongue.

"Nero!" said the Dominie, "Nero! Nero! Nero!"

That was all he said.

II.

THE New Year was four months old already. Its snowy coverlet had long ago melted away from it. Already it sat up in bed and smiled.

In the pastor's study, with its red curtains and ruddier firelight, all looked warm and cosy. On the rug lay Nero, his nose between his fore-paws, his whole soft figure shapeless with slothful repose. By the writing-table sat the Dominie, his face upon his hands, thinking.

Life was easier now for the Dominie in many ways. Not that his people had grown easier to handle, or that he had grown wise in the handling, but he thought he had grown wiser, and that is a great thing. In all humility he did his best.

And Nero kept him company.

He had resolved some weeks ago, with youthful confidence, to desist from his earlier platitudes regarding evil in general, and to preach to his own congregation about their own besetting sins. He did not expect them to like it, but he expected it to do

them good. He was mistaken. They liked it. Each of them liked hearing about his neighbour's sins.

To mitigate somewhat the appearance of personal allusion, he had hit on a plan which he considered ingenious. He had announced from the pulpit that a box would be placed at the church door to receive any suggestions of imperfectly comprehended texts that any member of the congregation might care to make.

The plan did not work very successfully. The minister might have taken warning from an old friend of his own grandfather's, who had laid a wager that he would preach a good impromptu sermon from any text he found upon his pulpit cushion. When the day came a scrap of paper awaited him. He took it up, saw nothing written on the one side, turned it round, saw nothing written on the other. He faced the grinning congregation with folded arms. "Nothing?" he said. "Nothing? 'Behold, thou sayest, I have need of nothing, and knowest not——' You will find my text in Revelation III. 17;" and he poured down upon them such a stream of denunciation as singed their callosity with the very flames of hell.

On three several occasions of late, when going to unlock his box, the Dominie had found it to contain

the selfsame verse in varied handwriting: "Woe unto him through whom offences come."

One of the papers he knew to be Miss Kezia's; but, then, he was not acquainted with Miss Jemima's caligraphy, nor with the pothooks and hangers of the sisters' rheumatic old maid.

"I cannot imagine what it means," said the minister to himself for the twentieth time. He gazed down on the little paper he had brought home with him that afternoon. He could not make it out at all. He knew not what to do.

So he threw himself down on the carpet and romped with Nero.

A knock at the door disturbed him. The minister disentangled himself from the canine confusion all over him, and shook out his rumpled black clothes. He wondered what his hair looked like as he called, "Come in!"

"John Doyerfeld is asking to see you," announced Mina, who never spoke of anyone as "Mynheer," "but he won't cross the threshold, he declares, till he's assured that there dog's locked up." And Mina cast a murderous glance, like a blow, at Nero, whom she hated. The dog winced.

"Go into the bedroom, Nero, and shut the door after you," said his master.

The dog obeyed.

"What I want to know is this," said John Doyerfeld, standing in the middle of the room. He was very spare and neat and respectable, black-coated, white-tied, and white-haired. "What I want to know is just merely *this*—and, as an elder of the church, I have a claim to be answered. When you preached last Sacrament Sunday about leaving one's gift before the altar, did you mean *me?*"

"I meant everyone who has not forgiven his brother. So did Christ. All the worse for you, John Doyerfeld, if you are one of those Christ meant."

"Dominie, you are insolent!"

"So, then, was my Lord and Master," cried the young minister, white to the lips.

"Hold your tongue!"

"And an elder in Israel bade them smite Him on the mouth."

John Doyerfeld grasped his hat tight.

"That ever I should live," he said, turning away, "to hear blasphemy in this house from a minister of the Gospel! Well, well, truly hath our Saviour spoken: 'It is impossible but that offences should come!'" He hesitated by the door. "Is that vil-

lanous dog of yours safely out of the way?" he asked.

The Dominie nodded, unable to speak.

The oft-repeated text, striking him once again from John Doyerfeld's lips, seemed to weigh down his soul with a sudden blast of approaching misfortune.

He went back to the dog, but his attention was distracted. Till now he had found refuge in the supposition that all the papers in the box might be traceable to Miss Kezia, for was it not to her that he had unwarily quoted the fatal words? but others, evidently, applied them to him. Who? Why? The air seemed full of indefinite menace.

"Nero, old boy, I do believe they dislike you as much as they do me!" he said, shaking his head to his companion's uplifted gaze. "I suppose it's a case of 'love me, love my dog,' inverted. 'The opposites of equals are equals.' That's Euclid, or ought to be. You've a very bad name, Nero; mind you don't live up to it." He went to get the dog some supper, for Nero had of late grown dissatisfied with regular meals. Now again he sniffed at the food, but left it untasted. He whined, before a familiar cupboard, for rusks.

Suddenly the minister grew anxious about his dog. Suddenly he realised that he had been anxious for some time. Nero was not his old self; he was dejected, even occasionally morose, though he would always repent, with overwhelming display of affection, whenever he seemed temporarily to hold aloof. The minister scrutinised his despondent expression where he sat with drooping lids, his eyes drawn back to his ears. "I wonder whether he is lonely and misses all the others," thought the minister. "It certainly wouldn't be surprising if he did." He knew that the dog could never be sent back to Adrian. The new dog tax had indeed made it impossible for the widow to retain him.

He waved his hands away from his face as one who gasps for breath. "Come!" he cried, and, rushing from the house, raced with the dog to the village through the breezy spring night, till he saw the lights drawing nearer, and remembered he was a minister.

He turned down a side lane, to the doctor's little yellow house. The doctor was a jovial, Burgundy-nosed bachelor, a sceptic, and the one man with whom the minister could enjoy an honest, open dispute.

"Dear me, is it only you?" said the doctor, turn-

ing lazily, in his shabby dressing-gown, from his grog, as the parson burst in upon him, "I thought it was some grand case of over-eating among the Doyerfelds, good for ten florins, at least."

"Doctor, can you see if a dog is ill?" replied the Dominie abruptly.

"No, of course not. We doctors know nothing about animals; animals have nothing in common with 'the human form divine.' Oh, of course not! All you theologians know that."

"What is the matter with Nero, then?"

Immediately the doctor became serious, and, with the Dominie's assistance, he felt the patient's pulse, and examined the whites of his eyes and his tongue.

"There's nothing much the matter with the brute," said the doctor. "He's a little out of sorts, and I'll give you a draught to clear the system. But, I'll tell you what's the trouble, if you really want to know. Like most of us, he's growing old and cantankerous. That's a disease no medicine can cure."

"He isn't in the least cantankerous," replied the Dominie vehemently. "His temper's that of an angel. He's never even bitten Mina."

The doctor eyed him curiously. "Have you never heard that this kind of big dog is apt to turn crusty with time?" he said. "You haven't, have you? Well, better look out. If *I* might recommend a remedy, it would be a drastic one. I should say, 'Change of air!'"

"What do you mean?" cried the minister, growing hot.

"Change of air—you know. I don't fancy this seaboard agrees with him. Send him somewhere else."

The Dominie stared for a moment, then found that he was too angry to reply, and rushed away.

The doctor settled down to his glass. "Never give advice," he soliloquised. "But what's the use of saying that to a medical man? Poor Dominie, he'll hear it on all sides to-morrow."

The Dominie went to bed in a huff, and woke up in a bad temper.

He was pottering about in his little vegetable garden, when suddenly a dark shadow intervened between him and the feeble April sun. Looking up, he saw Miss Kezia Vandonderboom.

"I want the price of those chickens, please," said Miss Kezia in a voice like a whiplash.

"My housekeeper pays for things," replied the

young minister loftily. "But I haven't had any fowl since I came."

Miss Kezia turned green. "Do you take me for your butterwoman, Dominie?" she said. "I don't need to sell anything, thank Heaven. But I'm not going to have my and my sister's chickens chased by your brute of a dog without getting paid for the damage."

"Nero?" cried the Dominie, white and sick. "Does Nero chase your chickens?"

"Your dog does, whatever his evil name may be! And you a Christian pastor, calling your dog after the Babylonish tyrant! I daresay he's going mad, like that monster went: howsoever, *he* don't eat grass, but chickens!"

"I will pay for the damage. How much is it?" said the Dominie, hoping it was not much. He went in, to his desk.

The sight of silver softened Miss Kezia. "Ah! Dominie," she exclaimed, shaking her head, "how truly I warned you, more truly than I could have ventured to think, that you would come to mourn the causing of offences! Take my advice, Dominie: shoot that dog!"

He turned on her. "It was you that put that

text into the box," he said. "How often, I should like to know?"

"Three times," replied Miss Kezia promptly. "I, and Jemima and Jane."

He bowed her out ceremoniously, and then summoned Nero to his presence. He stood looking down on the dog, and the dog sat looking down on the floor.

"Nero, Nero!" said the Dominie, "I wonder how much more you have on your conscience. Would it be any use, I wonder, changing your evil name? Supposing I were to give you a fresh start as 'Paul'?"

Nero guiltily wagged his tail. Then, like the lonely young fool he was, the young minister stooped and kissed the culprit's smooth black head.

There was thunder in the air. An irresistible disquiet impelled him to go out into the village, down to the church, and the text-box. He took the dog with him, being resolved never in the future to let the animal out of his sight, unless he locked it up.

"No, we shall not part, Nero," he said. "If it be true that your high-day is over, all the more reason for me to stick to you in your decay. Be-

sides, to whom could I dispose of you? No, we shall not part."

It seemed to him, as he passed along the village street, that the people eyed him with malevolence. He remembered having noticed this before of late. He told himself that it did not matter much. He could never hope, anyhow, to conciliate the Doyerfelds, and the Hockmans, and all the numerous saints of his congregation. He yearned for a downright sinner like himself.

The dog slunk behind him. People whispered and pointed to the dog. A mother drew away her toddling baby with frightened face. A little boy, safe behind a railing, threw stones.

The minister unlocked the text-box. There were two papers in it with the accusatory words. One of these was in John Doyerfeld's handwriting.

The minister walked back reflectively, speculating as to who could have written the other. He resolved to take down the box, which was becoming an obsession. And he abused himself for a coward.

He was roused from his reverie by an outburst of shrieks and revilings. He looked back hastily; he had just turned a corner; the dog had disappeared.

He ran back. An excited crowd was forming by

one of the cottages. The Dominie plunged into the midst of it. An unkempt creature, the tears coursing white down her dirty cheeks, knelt by the roadside, straining to her ragged breast an equally dirty, howling child. A chorus of ragged, loud-voiced sympathy went up all around them.

The Dominie recognised Mie Stap the drunken cobbler's wife, just as her husband, the bully, burst in among the rapidly receding spectators.

"Bitten the child, has he?" shouted the cobbler. "Let me get at him, the great hulking brute, or his sneak of a master! Ah, there you are, are you?" he continued in a lower tone, suddenly espying the Dominie's black coat. "Your dog's bitten my child and nearly killed it, and I'll shoot him—I swear I will—the first time he comes my way."

"No, you will not," replied the Dominie. "Let me see what I can do for the child."

The child was undeniably wounded, though not severely. At sight of the blood across its arm a shriek went up on all sides. It had chased the dog, flinging stones, and the dog had bitten it.

The Dominie's calm words infuriated his antagonist. "I shall shoot him and thrash you first, you yellow-faced parson!" shouted the cobbler, all the early drink in him mounting to his own purple

visage. "What d'ye mean, coming here, preaching peace in the pulpit o' Sundays, and prowling about the place all the rest o' the week with that murderous brute, like a beast of prey? The whole village wishes it were rid of you and your dog, that it does! And no chickens nor children safe in the streets for fear of the parson's little pet! I'm a better friend to the village than the parson, and, by G—, I'll make you kill that dog yourself!"

They had drawn back into the yard by the cobbler's hovel. The curious crowd clustered, at a respectful distance, round the entry.

"Peace, drunkard!" said the Dominie, standing motionless: "I dare you to touch the dog or me." He folded his arms.

"Ah, you've easy daring," replied the cobbler, "with that ravening dog behind you to help you to speak bold!" And, indeed, the minister felt Nero, at that moment, timidly rubbing against his legs. He dragged the dog into an outhouse and bolted him in.

"Now!" he said, coming back. "I'm very, very sorry for what's happened, but I'm not afraid of you, Bram Stap, and so I tell you. You won't get anything out of me by bluster. I shall do with my own dog what I choose."

The cobbler calmed down before the other's quiet tones. "No offence," he said, slouchingly "no offence, Dominie, but when a man loves his children as I do——

"He spends all his earnings in drink," interrupted the Dominie. He deliberated a full minute. The crowd outside wondered what would happen next. "If I send the dog away," said the Dominie at last, cautiously reading the man he had to deal with, "it shall be of my own free will; and to prove that it is, I make my conditions. If I send the dog away this week, you, Bram Stap, shall come to church next Sunday, sober. Do you agree?"

"Oh, I agree," replied the cobbler roughly. "Send the dog away, and how do you know I'll keep my share?"

"Because a man may be a drunkard and a bully, and yet not altogether a blackguard," replied the Dominie; "because I think you'd like to prove you're not."

"This, at least, is a sinner," thought the Dominie bitterly. "He doesn't quote texts."

He turned on his heel and went to release the dog. When they reached the parsonage together, he locked his study door, and sat long into the after-

noon, heedless of the old woman's calls to luncheon, his hand against Nero's glossy neck.

In the evening, as the shadows began to lengthen across the wastes of water, the Dominie and his dog passed slowly down the village, on their way to the landing-place.

The villagers gathered at their doors and along the street, and watched. The Dominie looked neither to right nor left, avoiding all salutations. The dog drooped, head and tail.

"Well, it's a mercy you spoke up as you did, Bram Stap," said one of the cobbler's boon companions; "I could see he saw you meant what you said. And a precious funk he's in—no wonder!"

The cobbler turned upon the speaker with an oath. "Hold your tongue," he said, "or I'll knock your ugly eyes out."

The minister went on along the dyke, where the broad estuary once more swelled and glittered—away from the village—into the loneliness. By the landing-place the little steamer lay puffing. The minister had telegraphed to a friend in Friesland who, living on a lonely moor, had lately been in search of a watch-dog. He led Nero on to the deck.

He did not dare to take leave of him. He knew that the dog understood.

Away, into the unending distance the steamer, turning slowly, steered its course. The grey heaven sank lower and lower, leaden-coloured, leaden-weighted, upon the leaden water. The Dominie stood on the dyke.

Suddenly a long, long-drawn howl arose upon the evening air.

TOM POTTER'S PILGRIMAGE.

TOM POTTER'S PILGRIMAGE.

FAR astray on the desolate moor, far beyond the last faint indications of human sociability, beyond the farthest public-house that stands, an outpost, to catch the distant wanderer, far beyond, with miles of loneliness all around it, Tom Potter's cottage sleeps, turf-covered, among the motionless waves of turf. Nobody ever comes near it, except the rabbits or, once in a way, the Baron's officious gamekeeper—to see if old Tom Potter be not yet dead.

But he isn't dead. He has no intention of dying. He has talked about the thing so often, these last twenty years, he has forgotten to do it.

He is past eighty—ten years past, he says, but that is an old man's haste to attain a hundred. He never had any relations or connexions of any kind. The villagers say he has always lived out on the moor.

On a silver summer evening, a night so soft and silent that even a snuffy old gaffer sees the stars and

the glow-worms, Tom Potter sat in front of his hovel, smoking. That afternoon, on the dusty highroad, he had picked up an untouched cigar, just dropped by a passing cyclist; with reckless honesty he had shouted to stop the tourist, who, suspecting mendicancy, had swiftly sailed away. Such an event had never occurred before, and was most unlikely to occur again; yet, henceforth, on his daily trudge, Tom Potter would dream, eyes downward, of wealthy swells and noblemen sowing tobacco along an old man's cheerless path. Not noblemen. Tom Potter belonged to the past: the gentleman cyclist, paddling his own legs for pleasure, was a thing you heard of, and disbelieved.

But from Tom Potter's modest standpoint almost all men are moderately wealthy. The men, for instance, who own two pigs. As he sat, laboriously reflective, he wondered at the thought of countless numbers who could lightly lose a whole cigar. There was no invidiousness about the wonder. Providence had willed these natural inequalities. Tom Potter belonged to the past.

During the last fifty years he had asked for nothing but daily work for daily food. The work had decreased with failing strength, but so had the need of nourishment. In youth the gates of all the senses

swing open to enjoyment; Tom Potter, in his day, had seen the riotous train sweep, loud, across his soul. But that was more than fifty years ago, miles away, almost in another life; nobody knows anything about it.

The one thing he dreaded was cold. A little hunger had its compensations: it is the best of sauces, until you let it burn; it is also the best of restoratives when the muscles refuse to work. A little thirst cannot do much worse than disturb your temperate potations. But cold—cold—with infirmities increasing and inadequate peat, and shivers even in the aimless summer breezes—cold, that was what he dreaded, the poor man's silent foe. The hovel was a ruin; a hundred draughts swept through its many cracks. He, too, was a ruin, its aged occupant, and the draughts pierced now where they had never pierced before.

But this night, at any rate, no chill would strike upon the mellow air. And yet, in spite of comfort, of contentment, in spite of treasure trove, Tom Potter's meditations were the saddest he had known through all these fifty uneventful years.

For, that very morning the village doctor had answered a question become inevitable. The old man was right. The trouble at his heart—the sudden

catch, the spasm—was the slow beginning of the end. Tom Potter must abandon the little jobs which still kept body and soul together. It wasn't a matter of life and death; he simply couldn't do them, the miserable odds and ends. He must apply, at last, for outdoor relief.

"And long may you enjoy it!" said the doctor, with rough good-nature.

"Aye, I shall live to be a hundred," answered Tom. That was his standing, oft-repeated joke; for the first time it seemed to have lost its laugh.

Like all men of his class, he had the smallest opinion of the doctor. If the poor believe in anything, it is quacks. Expensive quacks. But he knew that the doctor spoke truth, because he had known it before the doctor spoke. He couldn't work any more. He would never be able to work again. Well, he was past eighty, and last year he had owed no man anything, not even the Burgomaster's Christmas present of tobacco, for had he not done an errand for the Burgomaster's wife?

He rebelled fiercely against the idea of parish relief. He felt that this was absurd of him; so few people mind it. The doctor would have thought the fancy most extravagant; the doctor had no experience—outside romance, for he closed his eyes—of

beggars who didn't choose—to be helped. But here was the last relic of Tom Potter's handsome, stalwart, tempestuous youth. He was strong in himself, headstrong, strong of arm, all-sufficient. He owed no man anything—no, nor God.

He set his toothless gums hard, mumbling the delicacy his quick eye had gained for him—a quick eye at eighty-five!—many a young fellow of twenty was not half as fit for work as he—Pah! A wicked look settled on his face. He was thinking, very sluggishly, of his own long-buried youth, of the climax, away yonder, in the noisy seaport, the sudden end of the beginning, as he called it, he who had now come to the slow beginning of the end.

He had been a first-rate seaman, able-bodied, stout of heart, but wild. Before he ran away to sea, he had deserved his mother's thrashings; she was always drunk, however, when she thrashed him, and that precludes discipline. He had not been drunk, now, for more than fifty years. His drunkenest fit had been the last, on that day when his wife ran away from him, back to the man he had stolen her from, her bridegroom, his messmate, ten years his junior. She was a bad lot, his wife, and a lady too, a doctor's daughter, sunk to be a barmaid. She had run from Piet Jansen before she died—quite a girl,

poor thing! But the child was safe enough, little Anthony, taken by respectable relations of the mother's, properly cared for. The father, burrowing into oblivion away on the moor, had never lost sight of the child. He had looked on his whole career from the outset, watching it vaguely, as well as he could. Whenever Anthony rose a step higher on the ladder he climbed so securely, Piet Jansen would write from Amsterdam. Piet Jansen, poor fool! Tom was supposed to have gone to sea, immediately on his wife's desertion, with a ship that foundered. Only his rival, happily married to a fairly thriving rag-shop, knew of his existence "in the desert, like a baboon." Sometimes Tom Potter wondered why this man, who hated him, wrote of Anthony's continuous success, but he was shrewd enough to hazard an explanation: Piet Jansen believed every letter to be a stab. Tom Potter would gladly have paid for each, if necessary, in blood.

There came a time when the newspapers supplemented these epistles, then a time when they supplanted them. The villagers knew little of the wild man of the moors; they were amused to find him suddenly frequenting public-houses, amazed to see him sitting there, and not even getting drunk. You went to a tavern for the business of drinking or the

pleasure of discourse; the wild man came to read the paper! His eagerness about it became a constant source of fun, but behind his back, which was broad and resolute, like the eagle-featured, sunburnt face, people asked each other with a wink, what Tom expected to find there—an unknown legacy, or a nomination as Minister?

When Anthony was struck down by swift disease in the midst of his prosperity, Tom Potter made no sign. He left off going to the public-house. He wasted a whole evening shaping a little black rosette out of a bit of old black ribbon; wasted, for when the rosette was ready he took it off his cap again, and flung it into the fire. Why should he mourn for a son he had never seen? Yes, once, in a comic cartoon he had found his portrait and fancied a strong resemblance to himself. He had resisted the yearning to buy the picture. Well, now the whole thing was over. There were children, he knew—the rich wife's children: they were no farther, no nearer, than the dead man, his son.

He mustn't have parish relief—not parish relief! He had never owed any man anything. He got up and faced the darkly-glowing heavens. He was eighty-five years old, and his son had died at fifty! The self-same stars looked down on a mansion many

miles away—in another province, several hours off by train—he had never seen it, knew nothing of it. To old men death is easiest; to them it doesn't come.

Parish relief means inquiries. His shrivelled check burned a dusky red. No, that doesn't matter; he was safe enough there. Pride had driven him from the child of his shame and had kept him from the child of his glory. It was false to say that he disgraced his descendants by the acceptance of parish relief. He owed nothing to any man. Not even to his son's children an honourable past.

His son's children. The beginning of the end. He could think of nothing else. His eyes turned southwards, as they had so often turned, for fifty years, by night and day. Not parish relief!

The cigar dropped from between his lips. He stooped down, and dusted it carefully against his shabby sleeve, and stuck it back again.

* * * * *

Through the beautiful beechwoods of Varenslo their fortunate owner, Everard Plas Potter, strolled home in the summer twilight. He was tranquilly contented with himself and his surroundings, modestly conscious of his position, a man under thirty, enjoying excellent health, possessed of a beautiful place in

the country, and already a Member of the States-Provincial. He had married wealth, like his father, and, unlike his father, love: for the father by doing as much as he could had enabled the son to do more. On the pedestal of the father's strenuous erecting the son stood serene. The father had never seen the scaffolding down; the son wished the pedestal higher. But he was very well satisfied with it, all the same.

He had been down to the village himself, to send a telegram. To-morrow was his only sister's birthday; he had telegraphed acceptance of an invitation to dinner; it was the first birthday since her marriage to an officer of rank in the neighbouring garrison town. The postmaster had been obsequiously regretful that Mynheer's letters should just have gone up to the house. Mynheer dawdled at the side-gate, waiting to catch the postman. He would like to see Marian to-morrow at the head of her table. Hers was just the kind of match that would have pleased papa.

The postman stood before him, cap in hand. Mynheer took the little packet and walked towards the house. There was a note from a friend about an appointment, which he scanned in the dusk; and, furthermore, there were the newspapers, a couple of

letters for the servants, a bill, a begging letter. These he thrust into his pocket; he hesitated about the begging letter—should he tear it up unopened? The lamp was lighted in the back drawing-room; he went in.

His wife was busy at the tea-table.

"Is Anthony asleep?" he asked, speaking of their only child, a boy of five. Anthony was safe asleep, well, as always; he had gone to bed amid roars of laughter.

Three dogs lay under the tea-table; one of them yawned and stretched his legs.

"How fat Tub grows!" said Everard; "he gets too much to eat."

His wife looked across at him, laughing.

"That is a common complaint in this house," she replied. "Just look at cook, and John! And you and I oughtn't to throw stones."

"I don't eat too much," he said, throwing himself into a chair. "Unless you mean sauces? I must admit I do like a good French sauce. And your mother's receipts are excellent."

"Mamma got them from her uncle, the Consul," said the lady, arranging her little blue cups, "and his was a lifelong experience."

"I know, I know," he answered. He lay back,

consciously enjoying the comfort around him, and therefore began talking of their little household troubles. A good servant leaving, the gardener's wife again ailing—that mysterious breakage of a vase in the boudoir. It was pleasant to reflect you had nothing worse to fret over. Nor did they fret unreasonably, pleasantly occupied with themselves, their lives, the welfare of those around them.

"Another begging letter — evidently," he said, daintily poising the dirty missive between finger and thumb. "Well, it can't be helped. I may as well open it, and see if it's worth attending to."

"The poor must beg, and the rich must give," she answered, gently. "That seems quite natural."

He smiled, opening the envelope. "A good woman's social economy!" he said. "And a good woman's social economy is always all wrong." He began reading, with the smile on his face, but the first words of the letter swept it away.

"High and Nobly Born Sir," said the letter. "Your High Nobleness is a very fine gentleman, and you live very grandly, as your father did before you. But did your father ever tell you—or did he not?—that *his* father, a common sailor, that married a bad woman, who left him, lives in a miserable hovel in want of daily bread—lives there still, without food or

clothing, though he's ninety years old? Does your Mighty Nobleness know that or not? I see your name in all sorts of charity lists (your father was more in the political line), but how about your own flesh and blood, as the Bible says—and it's bitter cold of nights, and not having enough to eat!—Your friend,

"X."

"Well?" said his wife.

"Oh, it's nothing," he replied hastily, and, crumpling the letter in his hand, he walked out on to the verandah.

He knew nothing of this. Before God, he knew nothing. His father, the early orphaned son of a sea-captain, had been brought up by relations on the mother's side, who had always abused the dead sailor, perhaps because he had really been as bad as they loved to paint him, perhaps because his naval captaincy had been in the merchant service. But the relations themselves had been essentially middle-class: such people make subtle divisions, so Anthony Potter had always argued to himself and to his son. He, Anthony, had worked himself up with a will, studying, as a notary clerk, to take his University degree; he had married the rich notary's ugly daughter—married young, for the daughter was old—had pushed himself forward in the town he lived

in, had talked himself into Parliament, had become a power in council because he could talk more fluently than most men about things he didn't understand, had talked much about most things, but little of his family history. What he knew he had told. Of course their origin was humble. Everard, luxuriously educated, thoroughly accomplished, married to a charming wife, was aware of that fact, and content to let it rest. He believed his father's parents—a merchant captain, and a doctor's daughter—to have been dead for something like fifty years. He had always been told so.

And now—a common sailor, and alive! Hunger, and thirst, and cold! He looked up at the stars above him, and wondered if they, at this moment, were calmly shining down on the hovel and the old man. A common sailor—oh, never mind that just now! Hunger and cold! Well, at any rate, the nights were not cold in August. He smiled, bitterly.

He believed the whole story at once, in spite of the stupid piling up of the agony. To his lips it tasted true. Nobody had ever told him; that was his great feeling of injury. He was willing to believe his father had not known, and therein he judged rightly. Nor had Anthony willingly

spoken of his mother, from a vague dread of something wrong.

Who, then, had written this letter, and why? Not anyone desirous of benefiting the old man, or further particulars would have been given. Some meaningless enemy, therefore, secret and spiteful. Why should he have enemies? And why should these hold a secret unknown to himself?

A shivery discomfort seized on him. He despaired of discovering where the attack came from. But one thing he was resolved to do. He must consult the family solicitor—must attempt, by all means in his power, to find out his grandfather. But then, why, again, did the old man remain in hiding? What secret shame hung over their heads? He would never know. The name was no unusual one. He had not a scrap of information to start with. He foresaw, rightly, that he would never be able to trace the old man against his will.

"What a beautiful night!" said his wife, coming out on the verandah.

"Yes," he answered; and after a long silence—

"How happy we are," she murmured. "How good God is! I am so glad to think that Marianne, also, is happy now."

"Yes," he answered; then, suddenly—

"I can't go to Marianne to-morrow," he said. "I must go to Amsterdam on business. I couldn't be back in time."

"To Amsterdam?" she repeated, with only surprise in her voice. "You never go to Amsterdam—such a horrible, noisy place! And I didn't think you ever had any business!"

He laughed irritably. "Oh, it's some charity business," he said.

"In connexion with that begging letter? Dear me, what an important letter! You get so many."

He did not answer. He had never had a secret from her. He hated secrets and all unpleasantness. How could he disgrace her? And his sister? A pauper grandfather! A common sailor! Pooh, what a coward he was!

"I've got a headache and am going to bed," he said; but he repented the words, though they were true. A headache was a catastrophe in that comfortable household, and all ordinary means were available for making a sick man worse.

When he awoke from restless morning slumber, the night's resolution remained unchanged. Though he felt that the search was a hopeless one, it must be undertaken at all costs.

He drove off to the station in his dogcart, the

boy, Anthony, accompanying him so far. The mother, half reproachful, half quizzical, kissed her hand to them between the laurels and rhododendrons of the drive.

"Talk to me, papa," said Anthony twice, accustomed to a flow of merry unmeaning chatter. But the father only answered in monosyllables.

Before the little country station, white and red against the sun-filled road and sky, the usual knot of country people stood. They all touched their caps as the carriage drove up, and remained courteously contemplative, closely watching every movement of "the gentry" in various attitudes of respect. Usually the Lord of the Manor enjoyed this constant atmosphere of deference; to-day he hurried past the bowing station-master, then turned back to send a telegram to his sister explaining his desertion.

An old man, sitting on a bench, half rose, laboriously and with instinctive submission stood cap in hand.

"What a poor-looking old man!" whispered the child, early trained to easy pity. "How tired and poor he looks, papa!" The child was yellow-haired and chubby, in bare legs and a sailor suit.

"Does he? So he does," said the father, care-

lessly. "Is the telegram right? Thank you. Here, Tony, you can give the old man the change." Then a sudden pang struck his heart; he called the child back. His thought was of another old man, lost for ever in the seething mass of the world's misery, out yonder, in the hovel somewhere on the desolate moor.

"Here, give him this," he said, and put a gold piece in the child's hand.

The old man on the bench looked up in amazement. He made as if he would have rejected the proffered coin; he held it on his worn palm for a moment, gazed at the bright face opposite, gazed down on the gold piece. For once his pride gave way; he could not affront the innocent child.

"Thank you, little master," he said, humbly, closing his fingers.

The boy ran after his father, across to another platform: the Amsterdam train was just coming in.

"Who are they?" asked the old man, eagerly, of a porter lounging near.

"They?" repeated the porter, with the usual local wonderment at the stranger's ignorance. "That's Mr. Plas Potter, of Varenslo. The Lord of the Manor."

The old man let him move off to ring a bell and come back again. Then he said, "Great people, I suppose?"

"I believe you. The greatest people in these parts. Very wealthy. And charitable, as you saw."

The old man winced.

"And the lady," continued the porter, "a real great lady, as ever you saw. Affable to the poor, and condescending, not like your upstarts of yesterday."

"They've been here long?" questioned the old man, wistfully.

"I believe you," said the porter again. "Been here as long as I can remember. And his father before him, I've heard. The old Lord was a Member of Parliament."

The stranger put no more questions. Presently the porter said—

"You look regular done up."

"Yes, I came a long way. I tramped two-thirds."

"What did you come for?"

"I had business. It's done. I'm going back by railway, though."

The Amsterdam train had steamed away. The boy was coming back, beside the station-master.

"Going north, then, I suppose?"

"Yes; this'll take me, won't it?" He opened his hand and showed the gold piece.

"Deary, yes; take you all over the country. Whew! did they give you that?"

The old man's sallow cheek turned brown.

"No," he stammered. "Yes—yes—they're generous people, as you say. Good people. A real gentleman born and bred. You're lucky to have such people at Varenslo. Good day, little master. God bless you! good day."

He sat watching the child get into the dogcart; sat watching the carriage glide slowly down the dusty sunlit road.

"That old man said 'God bless you,'" remarked Tony gravely, to the groom who was driving him. "That was because papa gave him a gold piece, you know."

"THE TRICK."

"THE TRICK."

THEY were making love, under the great black shadow of the broad-beamed fishing-smack. The twilight hung around them in ashen folds; the air lay still, but their love-making, as that of sea folk should be, was stormy, like a winter sky.

"'Tis no manner of use," he said at last, with a gasp. "Your father'll never consent while your Cousin Govert lives."

"*Your* Cousin Govert," fiercely retorted the girl.

"Well, yes. My cousin, and yours. He's the only bond between us."

"The only bond!" angrily repeated the girl.

He kissed her as a storm-wind strikes, too suddenly, across the branches.

"The only relation we have in common, I mean."

"And, pray, am I to remain a spinster," she asked proudly, "until Govert chooses to marry—or die?"

"I suppose so, for unless he marries you, he will die unmarried."

"We have talked of these things before, Simon; we have got into a way of believing them. I wonder how much of them is true?"

"More than you would wish—or I. Hush! Everything is true. Since yesterday night I know everything."

"What, in the name of goodness, do you mean?"

"In the name of goodness, little. Listen. Put your head down here. Last night I stopped Govert suddenly on the sands, in the dark, and asked him. He told me at once. It is just as we have always fancied. His aunt left him all her money—the two smacks, the four cottages, for the property came from his family—but she made him promise to make a will bequeathing it all to me, her sister's son, in case he should die unmarried."

"And, of course, he has kept the promise."

"Why 'of course?'"

"Because that is just like Govert. And it's just like you to question why. Never mind. Simon, I love you; I don't care twopence for Govert. And so he will die unmarried, and you will be rich some day."

"No, he will marry you. Put down your head."

"Thank you, I prefer to hold it up. Simon, I understand my father; I should act as he does. I pity him deeply. And——"

"Yes?"

"And I disobey him."

Again he caught her in his arms, and kissed her furiously.

"It is madness," he said, "delightful, celestial madness! You are only nineteen. The law forbids you to marry without his consent before you are thirty; you can't wait eleven years!"

"What is eleven years? A moment."

"Nor I."

The air struck cold. She shivered. "If you were Govert," she said in a low voice, "he would give his consent to-night."

"I not being Govert, but only Govert's heir, he will give his consent—to Govert—to-morrow."

"I will refuse!" she cried vehemently.

He smiled. "All girls say that," he answered. "It's a very old story. But when it comes to the point—the beating and bullying and turning out of doors—they do as they are bid."

"Simon, you know too much; you talk too well for a common sailor."

"I am not a common sailor; I was second mate,

as you know. It's a manlier occupation than taking out excursionists at so much an hour. Sometimes I think I'll start fishing, like Govert."

"Govert's got a smack."

The words stung him. "Two smacks," he said.

She made no direct rejoinder.

"If you were Govert," she said at length in a whisper, "he would give his consent to-night."

"What *do* you mean?"

She faced round at him, where they lay, interlaced, under the looming hull.

"I don't know. Do you?"

"No."

"Then let's talk of something else." She shook herself free. "Let's try that binding business again, Simon. You didn't give me time the other night. Why, it's only a sort of puzzle! If you only leave me alone for a bit, I know I shall be able to get loose."

He laughed, and rising to his feet, a stalwart figure, he went along the vessel's side, looking for a bit of rope. The other day he had amused and annoyed her with this trick of binding your hands and bidding you undo them—quite an easy matter, if only you saw how.

"An English sailor taught it me," he said, "out in Demerary; it's as simple as anything. There,

Janna, I've got you now." He slipped the noose over her strong young wrists. "Look, I could do what I liked with you!" And he made as if he would have slapped her cheek.

"I don't mind that," she said, but she struggled to free herself. "I like feeling that I'm in your power and that you've bound me." But she struggled all the more to free herself. "Now, at this moment, Simon, if you was wanting to kill me, I could only close my eyes—so." She suited the action to the words, sinking back, a faint smile on her lips.

"Good-even!" said a man's voice in front of them. Govert Stendal stood beyond the shadow of the boat. "What's the joke?" he asked, and his voice was bright, unlike their tones, which had been soft and bitter.

"Simon has chained me," said Janna defiantly, "and see, he holds me chained."

"I will release you!" cried Simon's rival, with assurance: he knelt in the sand; he tugged fiercely at the rope.

"You are hurting me. That is all," said the girl coolly.

Simon smiled. Govert set his teeth, and blood sprang here and there from his fingers.

"Don't you think you had better give it up?" asked Simon.

The other leapt from the sand and struck his tormentor a full blow across the face.

"Hit him back!" cried the girl, also springing to her feet, and swaying in the uncertainty of her balance. "Hit him instantly, Simon, you coward! Unloose me! let me get at him! I'll hit him. Oh, Govert, I love you for doing that!"

"For that only?" he asked mournfully.

She turned on him at once. "Did you want me to love you for your money?" she said.

"You do not love me at all," he made answer.

She would have retorted, but her father's sudden appearance prevented her.

"Get you home, Janna," commanded her father. "What means this unseemly exhibition? Oh, Govert is with you, I see. Your sister spoke only of Simon."

"The little spy!" said Janna between her teeth.

"You know what I told you I should do to you if ever I found you alone with Simon. You hear me, Simon Parr, you pauper!"

"Hush, father!"

"What! Is my own daughter to bid me hush? I'm the biggest smack-owner in Holst. Do you hear me, Simon Parr? And my daughters are not for the likes of you. What's the nonsense about this string? Undo it!"

"Let Govert undo it," said Simon sullenly.

"I can't," muttered Govert.

"Do, and you shall marry me," taunted Janna. "Father, you wouldn't make me marry a man that couldn't even untie another's lover's knot?"

Old Roskam had been eyeing his daughter's bound hands in the half-light. "Pooh!" he said. "Govert'll tie you a faster knot than that, girl." She stepped away from under his extended fingers. "I'll marry the man who unties my knot," she cried. "I'll marry the man who unties my knot!"

A smile which she could not see crept over her father's face. "So you shall," he answered smoothly. "But, mind you, no tricks! Keep with me. You shall go out with us in the smack to-night. 'Tis glorious weather for fishing. And, by-and-by, before you go to sleep, Govert shall have another try at Simon's knot."

"I'll keep it till then!" exclaimed the girl. "No one shall touch it except the man who unties it. Promise me, father—all fair!—I may marry the man that unties my knot?"

Old Roskam laughed aloud. "You may," he said. "The matter shall be decided to-night; but, by Jove! you're too partial to Simon." He drew the scared Govert aside. "Keep silent," he whispered

hurriedly. "I know that trick. I learnt it years ago in Demerary."

Janna gazed triumphantly at Simon. "Well," she said, "you told me nobody could possibly discover how to do it. Oh, Simon, you heard father! He's passionate and unreasonable, but—but, Simon—he keeps his word."

"I don't believe it. I don't trust your father. And, besides, Janna, what's the use? Govert's got the money anyhow."

"Was it the money you was thinking of?"

"No, not the money. But your father 'll never allow me to marry you—and me a pauper; you heard him say it. He's fooling you!"

"Father's unreasonable, but father keeps his word."

"He's playing you a trick of some kind. He's playing you a trick."

"It's you that plays tricks!" she cried, laughing happily, and held up her twisted hands.

"Janna, if Govert were dead—supposing he died to-night, I should have the smacks, and the houses, and everything."

"Yes, but he isn't dead, nor likely to die."

"Janna, he's made the will he promised to. I know he has."

"He's a stronger man than you, Simon. I wished you'd hit him back."

"I'll hit him back, Janna, never you fear. If a man's hands were bound like yours are, Janna, another man could do with him what he liked."

"Fie! You wouldn't hit a man whose hands were bound!" said Janna.

"I didn't say that. Janna, if Govert were dead——"

She turned on him furiously.

"Kill him," she cried, "if you want to; but leave off talking about it." She hesitated a moment. "And kill him fair," she said, walking away.

Her father came round the prow of the boat, on whose other side he had been engaged in close confabulation with Govert. He saw the two lovers, a few steps apart, on the sand in the golden moonlight.

"Come along with me," he cried to the girl. "They're about starting. Govert's got to go home first and say he'll be away all night. He'll pull out to us in his boat later on. He can bring you along with him, Simon."

"I could come with you now. I'm ready."

"No, no. Let the two suitors come together; and the one that liberates the maiden shall wed her. But Govert must have first chance. Ha, ha! you're not fair to Govert. 'Tis like laying a wager when one

party knows the result." He went off, laughing, and calling to his daughter to follow him.

"I don't believe you," said Simon, between his teeth. "You'd never give up your daughter to—a pauper."

And the sea came up with sullen and sleepy roar.

An hour later Govert and Simon stood in the moonlight, by Govert's rowing-boat.

"Are you ready?" questioned Govert.

"I've never not been ready," was the ungracious reply.

"Well, my uncle wanted to go on ahead and have a talk, I suppose, with his daughter. Look here, Simon Parr, we can't both marry Janna."

"Nobody said we could."

"But we can both love her, more's the pity. I promise you one thing, I won't marry her against her will. Not *expressly* against her will. I can't do more."

"Oh, a girl's will! And, then, 'expressly.' Govert Stendal, you're safe enough."

"It's more than you would do for me; I know it. And, besides, there's this great difference between us: if I don't marry my Cousin Janna, I die a bachelor, and you——"

"Will be your heir."

The other started. "It's true," he said, "but nothing was further from my thoughts than that. And you, I was going to say, if you cannot marry Janna, will—marry somebody else, in time."

"'Tis a lie," said Simon coldly. "Let's get into the boat and be gone."

Govert paused, with one foot on the bow. "Shake hands before starting," he said. "I'm sorry I hit out this evening. You provoked me beyond endurance."

"Shake hands with yourself," replied Simon. "Why, pray, should you and I shake hands?"

"Because we're to put out to sea together. Every trip on the ocean means a possible mishap. I can't bear to be in a boat with a man that's not my friend."

Simon laughed harshly. "Oh, I'm your friend," he said, "the best friend you ever had, perhaps. Get in."

They glided across the slimy water. The placid moon looked down upon the cadence of their oars.

Far out to sea the fishing-smack, with Roskam and Janna on board, lay silently calling the smaller boat towards her.

The two men were well away from the shore be-

fore either spoke. Their skiff was lost in the moonlit dark, on the swelling expanse of the waters.

"Yes," said Simon gloomily, as if following out his own gloomy thoughts. "To-morrow, unless something stops you, you'll be publicly engaged to the girl."

"If I untie her," replied Govert, laughing.

"Don't try to fool me. Untied or not, 'tis to you they'll tie her. Poor thing! Poor honest, happy thing!"

"Simon!" The other's blood boiled. "Best hold your tongue, Simon. So'll I. Don't forget we're cousins."

"Oh, curse your cousinship!" cried Simon.

Then they both rowed on in silence across the slimy water. The moonlight played about the cadence of their oars.

Presently Simon spoke again, with an effort, as one who is eager to say what he would rather leave unsaid.

"You were talking about dying a bachelor—supposing you mean it."

"I do. 'Tis a stupid sort of thing to speak aloud. But 'tis true."

"Well—supposing—then, all the more reason for me to keep you from marrying—*her*."

"To — keep — me — from?" repeated Govert proudly.

"Anyhow," persisted the other, his voice gaining in assurance, "if I can't keep you from marrying her, I can teach you how to win her fair."

Govert did not answer, pulling steadily.

"Nobody'll find out about that knot unless he's shown. I never knew anybody to do it."

"Well?"

"I might show you—for a consideration."

"You offer to sell me your sweetheart?" said Govert, pulling steadily.

"I offer to sell you what'll never be mine. I put the best face I can on a bad business. In another twenty minutes—" he turned towards the vessel looming ahead—"you'll be making a fool of yourself before the lot of us, Govert Stendal. You'll get Janna, in any case: best win her honest. Give me a thousand florins, and I'll show you how to unfasten her hands."

"You speak plainly," said Govert, pulling still. But his eyes were interested; the other observed his look.

"Here's a bit of rope," continued Simon, producing one from under his jacket. "Shall I show you how it's done?"

Govert rested on his oars, and fixed a keen gaze on his companion. Simon looked away.

"Is it a bargain?" said Simon, with a catch in his voice.

"Yes, and no. If I succeed in freeing myself I pay you nothing."

"Of course." Simon laughed with the confidence of achieved success. "If you succeed in that, I'll pay *you* a thousand florins, though I don't possess a thousand pence."

"I don't want your thousand florins. Here!" Bending forward, Govert stretched out both arms. Simon, with frowning brow and trembling lips, held the noose. His hands shook so violently at first he could hardly steady them. He looked down into the bottom of the boat. "Come," he said in a very low voice. The oars plashed beside them. They lay on the water almost at rest.

"Tie it tight," said Govert cheerfully. "As tight as you tied Janna, mind, or you won't be able to show me properly. Don't you think it's rather a mean thing, Simon, this thing that you're doing just now?"

"No, I don't think it's a mean thing," replied Simon with sullen voice.

"Don't you? Well, opinions differ. Heavens, man! what makes your fingers tremble so?"

"Drink!" answered Simon wildly. His companion looked incredulous, but only questioned.

"Did you hurt Janna's wrists as much as you are hurting mine?"

"Janna didn't cry out," retorted Simon, still with sulky accents and sunken eyes. "And, besides, you told me to bind you tight."

"Janna's a good plucked one. Have you done?"

"Yes," answered Simon, sitting back. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Govert, too, shoved back on his seat, and let his fettered hands lie in his lap.

"Well, aren't you going to try?" cried Simon impatiently.

"What's the use of trying? Don't you say it can't be done?"

Simon glanced up for a moment; exultation flashed from his eyes. But he only answered quietly—

"True, it can't be done. You're in my power, Govert."

"Yes," said Govert, with dangerous tranquillity. "A thousand florins is too much."

The man opposite barked at him with suppressed rage. "You'll be sorry you said that," cried Simon.

"I'm going to ask for two thousand, or I won't unloose you."

"Two thousand? When?" said Govert.

"Will you give me two thousand?"

"Supposing I say no?"

"You'll say yes," replied Simon, gently paddling forward. A cloud had come across the moon. It was dark.

"If you unloose me I will give you two thousand."

Simon returned no immediate answer. The water slashed against the keel. "You may well say 'if,'" he replied at length. "Govert Stendal, you're in my power."

"You remarked that before," said Govert coolly.

"Give me one of your two smacks also, and I'll untie you."

Govert looked across in swiftly indignant astonishment, but neither man could now discern the other's face. "What the devil do you mean?" cried Govert.

"I'll take the oldest and worst of the two—that's the *Mary Louisa,* isn't she? You see I'm not exacting." All the sneer had come into every word again: there never, in all the village, had been a sneerer like Simon Parr. "You must give me two thousand florins and the *Mary Louisa,* or——"

"Or?"

"Or we go up the side together, and Janna and all the rest can see what condition I've reduced you to. Oh, never fear; I'll help you up."

Govert looked down at his powerless hands, and seemed to reflect. Presently he lifted his head with a movement of definite resolve. The clouds had lightened along the moon: great rifts of yellow were piercing the slaty grey. Across the slate of the waters the fishing-smack loomed large, no longer distant, dark against the slaty sky.

"That's once too often," said Govert calmly. "I wouldn't have minded giving you the thousand florins —to make up for losing Janna: I suppose that isn't too much for them as reckons money could make up. I'd have let you unfasten my hands and show me the trick, if so being that was any satisfaction. I'd have let you do all that for losing Janna—for you *are* to lose her. But, dang it, Simon, you're a scoundrel. You want to rob me. I was sorry I struck you. I owed you a reparation. But, dang it, I'm almost glad."

The other, instead of listening quietly, had sprung to his feet. The light boat swayed to and fro.

"Sit down!" cried Govert.

"Oh, I'll sit down," replied Simon scornfully,

rocking the boat with extended feet. "You—you—refuse to give me the money, do you?"

"Yes, I refuse."

"Fool, you forget—though I told you once too often for your liking——"

"Twice too often," interrupted Govert.

"——Forget that I have you entirely in my power! You, whose life alone stands between me, a poor devil, and the money that'd gain me the sweetheart who wants to be—not yours, but mine. By G——! it was *you* that have provoked another man once too often! I was wondering all the time on the water—should I do it? undecided. You've decided, not I."

"What?"

Simon vouchsafed no answer. The moonbeams were once again rippling across the water in a broadening band of light. Govert watched his rival sit down in silence, deliberately divest himself of his jacket, draw forth a life-belt from under the seat, and lay it ready for use. The boat swelled and sank in the water, floating near to the ship.

"I'm going to upset us," said Simon hoarsely. "Save yourself if you can. You can't!"

He sprang to his feet again; the boat swung aside with the motion. The life-belt was in his

hands; he was endeavouring to adjust it, recklessly flung forward, ready to drag the whole thing down with his weight towards the water. In that moment he saw, with eyes dilated in horror, the man opposite him slip both hands out of their bindings, saw him leap up and upon him, felt the life-belt wrenched out of his grasp, felt the boat surge aloft and turn sideways and upwards and over, felt something strike him on the brow as the great rush of waters closed in around him, sweeping him away, 'neath its weight, into darkness and stillness and unutterable void.

Govert, fighting for life, in the first fear and thought of preservation, struck out from the suck of the boat. The next moment he paused, getting the life-belt under his armpits with an effort, and swam back a few yards, carefully watching. The boat lay bottom up, in the glitter of the moonlight. There was no sign of the missing man. Govert, sick at heart, waited in vain, with one arm against the hull. He never saw the face of his would-be murderer again.

"The life-belt struck him; it must have stunned him," reflected Govert. With some effort, he set himself to right the boat, and, in the perfect calm of the radiant sea, succeeded. He got into her, drip-

ping wet, alone, and, after protracted hesitation, sadly shaped his course towards the ship.

In another moment he hailed her and went on board.

"Where is Simon?" asked Janna's voice, as he set his foot on deck. He could not answer. She stood before him, her wrists still encircled by the string.

"Did you forget to bring him?" she asked tauntingly." You're late enough."

"I didn't forget to bring him," Govert stammered awkwardly. "We came together."

"Then what's he waiting for down there?" she cried. She looked over the side; she could see clearly enough in the moonlight that the skiff was empty. There was no one "waiting down there."

"Janna, I can't help it!" exclaimed Govert madly. He broke loose, hardly knowing what he said. "I can't help it! It's no fault of mine! I don't know how it happened. I don't think, Janna, it was any fault of mine."

"Fault of yours? What has happened?" Her face was white.

Then he told her hurriedly, confusedly—told her, at first, only that the boat had upset.

"And you had the life-belt on!" she screamed,

pointing. "You could swim better than he—brute! Did you hit him in the water?"

He would have answered, but she heeded nothing, hanging over the ship's side, fiercely weeping, for the truth had dawned upon her that Simon was dead. At last she lifted her face, violently checking the storm, becalmed.

"Murderer!" she said.

And he tried to tell a little more, to tell how the thing had happened, struggling to leave the dead man unaccused, yet to exculpate himself.

"Murderer!" was all she said, with her fettered arms against the gunwale.

His cheeks burned; he grew more explicit. Simon, he said, had upset the boat.

"Why?" she asked, still looking away in the moonlit darkness. "And *you* had the life-belt? Murderer!"

"*I* am not the murderer," he burst out. "Before Simon upset the boat he had bound my hands like yours. I was willing to pay him for showing me the trick, though I knew it: your father had just taught me; but while my hands were still bound, as he thought, Simon upset the boat!"

"I do not understand," she said, still looking

away. "I do not believe a word; there seems no sense in your story. Bound your hands—ah!" She turned to him, her face aflame. "Ah, I understand! He wanted to kill you!"

"He was my heir," said Govert.

"Liar! He was not thinking of that. You had struck him—you had insulted him—he wanted to kill you!"

"And so he tied my hands!" said Govert bitterly.

"It was I he was thinking of—I! He wanted me. He wanted *me*. Coward! by your own confession you hit him—in the boat, in the water, at some time, you maimed him. And *you* saved yourself!"

"Listen to me," he cried desperately. "It is not like that—honestly, it isn't. I don't think—oh, don't make it worse for me—I don't think, I'm not sure—no, I *can't* be to blame! By the God above us, that listens, I had no thought of hurting him. A man naturally endeavours to save himself—he'd attempted to murder me—it *was* murder—I—I seized hold of the life-belt—I waited——"

"Cease," she said. "You can spare yourself the trouble. Leave me alone."

"Janna, don't take on so. I can't bear it. He wasn't worthy of you, Janna; he really wasn't. He

would readily have sold his claim for a couple of thousand florins——"

"He was very poor," she said, more to herself than to Govert.

"I love you a thousand times more, Janna. Let me make up for him. Janna, you will marry me and make me happy, and be happy yourself some day, in time. Janna!"—his voice grew faint with pleading—"Janna!"

She drew herself up and faced him.

"You told me," she said, "that Simon was a coward."

"I did not say it."

"But you think it?"

"It is true."

"That he was a scoundrel?"

"Janna, what is the use of all this? I only tell you that he is dead, and that I love you!"

"That he sold his claim on my heart for money?"

"So be it."

"That he tried to kill you by treachery?"

"Even so."

"Fool! All these things you tell me, and I love him. And you ask me to forget him, and become your wife?"

"Not to-night."

"Aye, to-night. I must wed to-night."

"Let me untie your wrists. If one but knows, it is very simple."

She pushed him back. "Only my husband," she said, "shall untie my wrists to-night."

"But we cannot be married to-night," he pleaded.

Again she checked him. She had drawn towards a heavy weight which lay beside her. She now lifted it in her tight-bound hands.

"Who says not?" she answered.

"Janna, you know as well as I——"

Again she stopped him with an imperious gesture; and, holding the weight aloft. "You have told me much to-night," she said, "and this is my one reply."

She had steadied herself against the gunwale. With the deadly weight grasped tight between her fingers, she flung herself over the side.

WHY HE LOVED HER.

WHY HE LOVED HER.

"YES," said Hans Golding to his companion in the "trekschuit," "I love her for her father's sake." He puffed once or twice at his cigar with an air of great decision, and his eyes rested thoughtfully on the passing landscape.

The skipper of the barge made no reply. Hans Golding was his only passenger on this dull September evening, and so the skipper felt aggrieved. Besides, this stranger was a townsman from a distance, and the skipper was wary of what he called "foreigners," especially when these foreigners laid claim to an older acquaintance than his with a corner of the skipper's small world.

The boat crept onward through the falling shadows. Very slowly the water oozed around its ample bosom; very slowly the prim-cut trees slipped past along the straight line of dull canal. The sky sank leaden, like a coverlet of coming sleep. One or two ducks floated silently, too lazy to quack.

"Yes," began Hans Golding, "it was eighteen years ago, as I was telling you. Well, you don't remember me, and no wonder, seeing you wasn't here. My mother, she used to sell brooms along the highways—that was what my mother did—she was what you'd call a tramp. Oh, I'm not proud; I don't mind telling. I've got on in the world, I have. Try a cigar?"

"Thank ye kindly," said the skipper, "you'll excuse me not smoking it at once." And he shifted the plug of tobacco he was chewing while he stowed away the precious present in a pocket of his brown woollen jersey.

"She'd been ill for a long time before she died," continued the stranger, "but die she did, all of a sudden, one night in Baas Bultman's cowshed: died as a dog might die, on just such a still dull evening as this; and she wasn't a bad mother either. No, she was a good mother, say I, as mothers go nowadays."

He looked up at the skipper for confirmation, and the skipper nodded grave assent.

"They'd have thrown me on the parish but for Baas Bultman. I should never have come to nothing then. No, I should never have come to nothing.

Did you ever know anyone thrown on the parish as came to any good?"

The skipper took so long delving into all his experiences and memories of so vast a subject that his passenger lost patience.

"Well, I never did. Nor did anyone I ever heard on," said Golding in the tone a man assumes when he starts on his favourite theory. "Baas Bultman comes in to me where I sat crying by the body—I was only seven, you see, and hungry to boot—and 'My lad,' says he, 'you shall stay with me. But you'll have to work hard,' he says."

"Didn't he say d——d hard?" asked the skipper earnestly.

"Maybe he did and maybe he didn't; but when I tells the story I always tells it without."

"Well," said the skipper, "it don't sound natural for a man to talk about hard work without damning it. Howsoever, Ben Bultman was always pious, and I can't say as I've ever heard him swear much."

"Pious he is," affirmed Golding, "for he saved me from the workhouse, and if that ain't piety, show me what is!" He held his cigar aloft interrogatively at the skipper. But the skipper was not prepared to show what piety was.

"I lived with him," continued Hans triumphantly,

"and he brought me up—I won't say as it wasn't hard—but he looked after me. And when I was fourteen, and he saw that I wasn't the sort for the farm work, he prenticed me to a carpenter at Overstad, and——"

"Said he was glad to get rid of you," suddenly interrupted the skipper.

"Did he say that?" inquired Hans anxiously.

"So I've always heard," replied the skipper, a little ashamed as he fingered the cigar against his breast.

"Well, I dare say he was right. Howsoever, I've made my way. I've the smartest little shop in my part of the country. I settled over yonder, in the north, you know, at a small place called Dorkum—and look at me now!" He spread himself out in his dark check suit, and the dim evening light caught the glint of his watch-chain.

"You've been luckier than Bultman has," said the skipper, reflectively watching two pigs by the waterside.

The carpenter gave vent to an exclamation of regret. "When they told me," he said, "at our place the other day—'twas at market—that Baas Bultman was bankrupt, I said, ''Tis a lie! 'Tis a lie,' I said: I was that sure. And when Joris Piets, as is my

own neighbour and church clerk, told me as the thing was true, for he'd heard it from his sister's daughters that lives in these parts, why, you might have knocked me down with a broken reed, you might. I knew that Joris Piets wouldn't willingly tell a lie, and I said, 'I'll find out for myself,' I said, and as soon as I could I took the railway this blessed morning and come straight away!"

"How long did you do over it?" asked the skipper, naturally interested in distances.

"And now you tell me it's true," continued the carpenter, unheeding.

"Aye, it's true enough: he's going to be sold up next week."

"To think of it!" cried Hans, studying the handle of his tiny umbrella.

"They do say that he speculated," remarked the skipper, his eyes on more pigs farther down.

"Sold up!" repeated Hans. "And what'll become of his daughter?"

"Dina's to go into service: that's sure and certain," replied the skipper, glad in his own dull way to be the purveyor of such important news.

Hans Golding sat chewing his cigar in silence. At last he said—"Who'd 'a' thought it?" which re-

mark struck him as so exceedingly apposite that he made it over again.

"It's what you never think that always happens," said the philosophic skipper.

The carpenter slapped down his right hand on his knee. "I've always loved that child for her father's sake," he said; "she was a quiet little feeble thing, not much to look at, that timid and startled, afraid of a dead mouse. She never took much notice of me, going about in her own half-frightened way. Do you know, I used to think she looked down on me all the same—a charity boy, as you might say." He stared at the skipper, but the skipper saw no reason to commit himself.

"Well, it wouldn't 'a' been unnatural," reasoned Hans. "I've often thought it out. She'd pass by me that proud, as you might say, and not give me a look. Some people say it was shyness, but it isn't natural her being shy with a charity boy like me." He nodded his head. "She was a little lady, she was," he said.

"She'll have to climb down," remarked the skipper, who did not approve of these sentiments.

"I *ask* you," continued Hans, rising with outstretched hands, "is that sort of frightened little

nervous haughty creature the sort that you'd send into service? No!"

"P'raps not," said the skipper, with a grin.

"P'raps not! I tell you, no! Can you see her in a big loud kitchen with a lot o' servants? No Can you see her in a crowded drawing-room a-answering the bell? No! Can you see her listening in the hall to the talk of a young footman as is pinching her round the waist? No!"

"You needn't shout so," replied the skipper, "I don't want to see her in none o' them places."

The carpenter struck his umbrella on the deck and sat down again, looking wise.

"She ain't a beauty," continued the skipper. "Leastways, not what we call a beauty in these parts. She's too thin and pale, and what people in the town call 'delicate,' with them big eyes of hers. She won't find a husband here."

The carpenter nodded his head vigorously. "That's what I said to myself," he remarked.

"A husband!" repeated the skipper. "No, God bless your soul! And she with a bankrupt father!"

"I'm glad you've give me all the facts," said the carpenter. "You never hear 'em right at a distance —at least, not so as to make sure. And it's five years since I came near this place."

"Then why did you come now?" queried the skipper.

"I thought I'd like to look up the old man in his trouble."

"My! you are a rum 'un," said the skipper. "Well, Ben Bultman may be glad of the only good action as I can hear he did in his life. Oh, he's a pious man, I know, but that *hard*. I never heard as he gave away a halfpenny to a beggar. But there! Some men are good-natured all their lives and never meet with nought but ingratitude," said the skipper ruefully. "Well, gratitude ain't much good, that's a comfort." And the skipper pushed his fur cap aside to scratch his head. "No," said the skipper, "what Ben Bultman wants, and won't get, is *cash!*"

"I can't give him cash," replied the carpenter, glumly. "It's all true what you say. I've thought it all out afore I come." He got up and stretched his legs. "There's the house! My! how the pear-trees have grown. Let me out. I'm going up straight."

"Going up straight, are you?" echoed the skipper. "My! you are a rum 'un. Well, good luck to you. Good-night!"

Hans Golding strolled thoughtfully along the bit of path that leads up to the long white farmhouse. First he whistled a popular street song to hide his

embarrassment; presently he dropped into a very slow low Psalm tune, just enough to keep up his courage. He stood still at a little distance from the house, and his murmured whistle sounded like a sad and solemn dirge. There it lay before him, the small group of long familiar buildings, nestling in a clump of beech and poplar—the beeches were losing colour, the poplars trembled slightly in the heavy air. And over the shiny walls of homestead and outhouses the lengthening shadows fell. He shivered, for he suddenly thought that the wind was cold. Thus, as it now lay before him, he had never beheld the old place during all the years of his town life. He had often seen it, especially of winter nights, as it shone in the prosperous splendour of a sunny summer day.

Ben Bultman came out of the barn, and turned to look at the stranger.

"Why, it's you!" he said. Not another word of greeting.

"Yes, it's me, Baas," answered Hans, clinging hard to his umbrella.

"Well, and what have you come for? I can't say we want you here."

To this apostrophe Hans in vain sought a fit reply.

"You've got better friends in the village; go on to them."

"No, I haven't!" said Hans. He said it with such a burst that he coughed to hide his confusion.

"Well, I can't stand dawdling here. They haven't left me a herd to help me. I've got to look after the cows myself."

"I'll help you," cried Hans, pulling off his Sunday coat.

"You!" said the old man with undisguised contempt. "You never were much of a hand at farm work. More of a hindrance than a help."

"Well, I'll do my best," said Golding, following his old master into the shed.

"It don't matter much anyhow," remarked Bultman, busy with the fodder; "the whole thing's to be sold up next week."

"'Tis hard lines," replied Hans, up to his elbows in hay.

"No, it ain't hard lines!" cried the farmer, "for isn't it all my fault? Why don't you say it's all my fault?"

"How do I know whose fault it is?" said Hans Golding.

"They all say it's mine, if they know or not," replied Bultman.

"Well, I shouldn't have said it even if I'd known. It isn't a pleasing thing to say to any man,

Baas, and it wouldn't be my place to say it, anyhow."

Ben Bultman stopped for a moment, his arms full of hay, and stared at his former farm-boy.

"Well, you are a rum 'un!" he said; "but it was not my fault—though that don't make it no easier. I've been hanging on by the teeth for years."

They worked on in silence till everything was ready for the night.

"Well," said Hans as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead, "it comes natural like to be doing this sort of thing again."

"No, it never came natural to you," replied the old man, but not ungraciously. "You was town-bred, and you never took to farming. You're no better and no worse at it—that I can see—than ten years ago, when you left it. A good thing for you, Hans, that you went to the town: you've made your way. Others have got to begin theirs that are too old at the start to go far."

"I wish I could help you," said Hans timidly.

"Nobody asked you," came the gruff reply.

"Baas, may I say something? I haven't got any money, as you know, or I'd gladly give it you."

"You haven't got any to give, so you may say it," responded Bultman.

"But everything that I am I owe to you," continued Golding, standing with his coat still off in the gathering twilight of the shed.

"Well?" said Bultman.

"It was in this very shed that my mother died," spake the other, dropping his voice, "at just such a twilight hour as this. It was here you found me and took me to live with you. And if I can honestly earn my bread this day, I owe it to you, Baas."

"Get away," said Bultman.

"Baas, is it true that Dina is goin' out to service?"

"It's no business of yours," said Bultman.

"P'raps not. But, Baas, she ain't fit to go."

"D—— you!" said Bultman.

Hans Golding waited. "I," he stuttered at last. "I—look here, Baas: I've always loved you for what you did for me, and she's your daughter. I should never have thought of such a thing, of course, but, if you was thinking of an honest home for her—as they say you're off by yourself to work for your bread in foreign parts—you know what I've got, I could support her decent—and it might be better than service for such as she."

Baas Bultman stood facing his visitor in silence.

"I—I beg your pardon," gasped the other, very

red and miserable, "I know that it's a great presumption on my part. But I couldn't bear to think of your fretting your heart out with your daughter in service here."

"My what?" cried Bultman. "You idiot! Nobody has ever talked to me for twenty years of my heart!" Then he added, in a matter-of-fact tone, "I never knew you wanted to marry my daughter."

"I never did," replied Hans.

"Humph! Well, let us talk business. You think that you owe me a debt, and so you want to pay it. Have I understood you aright?"

"Yes, I owe you a debt," answered Hans.

"Well, make your mind easy; you don't."

"But you——"

"Hist! You are a fool, Hans. Do you think a man like me does a kind action for nothing? You owe me nothing. Go home and be content. Marry the girl you told us about when you were here five years ago."

"I don't want to marry her," said Hans.

"Did you love Dina ten years ago—five years ago?"

"No," replied Hans, "I shouldn't have presumed."

"Tut, tut! love presumes. I know that it did in

my day. And do you think I'd let you marry my daughter out o' gratitude to me? I don't want gratitude, you fool; I've no right to it, I tell you. Listen well!"

"What is it?" said Hans.

"When I took you it wasn't for any desire of mine. I swore that I wouldn't touch you, a workhouse brat! If it had been left to *me* you'd not have spent a night in my house. You'd be a charity boy to-day."

"Is that true?" stammered Hans.

"True as Gospel truth."

"A charity boy to-day," gasped Hans. "I should have come to nothing. A charity boy to-day." Then his face cleared. "But what made you take me?" he said.

"A—a relative of mine," answered Bultman promptly. "She came to me and offered to pay for you. 'He's a charity child,' she says; 'God has sent him,' she says. She called me a wicked name; I didn't care for that—everyone has always called me a hard 'un. So I am. But she offered to pay for you: that was different, and I took you. Pay for you? I made you work."

"Pay for me?" repeated Hans stupidly. "Yes, you made me work." But again a bright thought

struck him: "It was you that 'prenticed me to the carpenter at Overstad?" he cried.

"Not I. She paid every penny she had to do it. I should have kept you at the farm. 'He can't do the work,' says my relation. 'He must,' says I. 'I'll pay for him to learn a trade,' says she. 'More fool you,' says I. And she did."

Hans Golding heaved an immense sigh and stood silent.

"So, you see, you owe me nothing. I got plenty of work out of you while it lasted, my lad."

"But—this relation?" exclaimed Hans.

"Do you want to marry her?" responded the other, with a laugh.

"No; but I would like to thank her," answered Hans.

"You can't," replied Bultman shortly. "Go home in peace, you zany, and marry the girl you want to marry. Marry a girl for her own sake, not her father's, and leave me and my daughter in peace."

"Father, aren't you coming?" said a voice behind him. Dina stood in the door with a lamp. The lamp shone on her delicate features and light-brown eyes. Truly she would never have done for a farmer's wife, thought Golding. Then all went across to the farmhouse, and soon sat down to the

evening meal. It was a silent repast. Dina spoke once or twice of old friends, of old times, of the city; but the cloud of a great sadness hung over them all.

Towards the end the farmer went out of the kitchen to fetch a bottle of brandy, and Hans and Dina remained together. She began to speak at once of the great trouble, of her grief for her father, soon to fare out into the wide world alone.

"And you?" said Hans.

"I don't mind," she answered quickly.

"Don't mind? Oh, Dina! Don't mind going out to service? You're not fit for it."

She looked at him, trying to say something, but her eyes filled with tears; she broke down and fled.

"Baas," said Hans, when the old man came back with his bottle, "I've been thinking it all over during supper, and I find I was mistaken—I'm sorry, very sorry, you didn't—I mean, I'm sorry I don't know who did—and—but, it needn't make any difference about Dina—if you'd let me ask her—if you don't think I'm presuming—I could support her easy—I—I wish you'd let me ask her—just ask her—to marry me anyhow."

"You owe me nothing," grumbled Bultman; "I never had any money to spare."

"Please, I should like to marry her all the same."

"Then you love her, do you?"

"Yes, I love her."

"And why, pray?"

"I don't care a d——," answered Hans, who had never been known to swear.

At that moment Dina came in with two glasses.

"Well," said old Bultman grimly, "don't you want to thank the person who insisted on my keeping you, and who paid for your apprenticeship out of her own money in the bank?"

Dina dropped both glasses.

"Oh, father, have you told him?"

"Yes," replied the father, "and he insists on marrying you out of gratitude."

"Gratitude be hanged!" said Hans. And he got up and ran round the table to snatch her hand. "I want to marry you because I love you. And I love you—because I love you," he said.

IN EXTREMIS.

IN EXTREMIS.

"GOOD-BYE, doctor!"

"Good-bye, child!"

"And thank you kindly."

He did not answer, but went down the garden-path, between the hollyhocks and sunflowers, an old man, bent with gazing deep into other people's sorrows, yet the tears swam in his kindly eyes as he shambled on through the sunset summer shadows.

Roosje turned by the dairy door; she went back among the blue and white tiles, the sweet smell of milk all around her. She was comely with the freshness of eighteen years' up-growing in Dutch pastures; her arms and neck stood out, perhaps a shade too delicately veined, against the tight-fitting black of her peasant costume and against her gold-pinned muslin cap.

"Dawdling!" said her stepmother's angry voice.

Roosje started. "I was thinking," she answered confusedly.

"Of the cows?"

"No, mother, not of the cows."

"Of sweethearts, then?"

Roosje hesitated. "No, not exactly of sweethearts," she answered slowly.

"Psha! what should a farmer's daughter think of but one of them two? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Roosje, and that's what I've been wanting to say to you. If it was an honest young man of your own sort as came courting you, well, so much the better, says I: there's mouths enough, anyway, to feed in this family. But no decent girl'd allow a young Squire to say he was sweet on her."

"He's never said a word like it!" cried the girl, her cheeks flaming, "never said a word all the world couldn't hear. We was friends ever since we was little children. We've always played——"

"I know what I know," replied the big farm dame sententiously, and moved towards the door; but her stepdaughter intercepted her.

"What do you know?" exclaimed Roosje: "you're new to these parts, and you don't understand our ways. It's different up in the North from what we do here. We've always played, all our lives, with the Squire's children."

"Have you? Stop now, then," replied the step-

mother viciously. She pushed through the door, but pausing to aim straight her final shot: "Madame's maid from the Château told me they all know he says that he's sweet on you," she added; "but he don't intend to marry you, he says."

Roosje remained standing in the golden shadows, among the shiny tiles; and the sweet smell of the milk was all around her.

The Squire's son came across the dreamy fields, in a haze of deep-blue evening, the lazy cattle lifted their heads to see him pass. He stopped by the dairy door: a little dog leapt about him and licked his hand.

"I join my ship to-morrow," he said.

"I know," answered Roosje.

"I have been here just a month," he continued. "It has been a very happy time."

She did not reply.

"Seeing my mother again, and my father, and all the others. What a lot of us there seem to be."

"Not more than here," she said.

"And where many pigs are, the wash gets thin," he said, quoting a common proverb.

"Gentlefolks always have enough to eat," replied Roosje.

"Have they indeed? Much you know about it!

You know nothing about it. You know nothing about gentlefolks, Roosje."

"No indeed," she said humbly.

"I mean, about their necessities. Now, look at me, a poor sailor man with half a dozen brothers and sisters. Obliged to sail away to the Indies for a livelihood," he laughed, "in the service of Her Majesty the Queen."

"How long will you be away?" she asked quickly.

"Two years, at the very least."

"The poor men's wives!" she said thoughtfully. "What a time it is!"

"Oh, I daresay the wives don't mind. No, I won't say that! 'Tis a hard lot, that of a sailor's wife. I should never dare to offer it to any woman."

She looked at him curiously. "Never intend to marry at all?" she said.

"Oh, some day, I suppose, when my seafaring days are over, I shall settle down somewhere with a bald brow, a middle-aged spouse, and money-bags."

She shook her head. "That doesn't sound nice," she said.

"Well, what can I do? For the next ten or fifteen years I can't be anything but a sailor. And so I can't marry if I would, and I wouldn't if I

could." He spoke with inward heat, as if arguing more against himself than to her.

She rattled the milkpans, moving them, looking away.

"See here: don't let us spoil these last moments talking about a dismal future. You see, I have come to say good-bye. I shall often think of the Farm-house, Roosje; think of the times when we all played together in the orchard and the haylofts. What a jolly round dozen we were! And now one of us is dead."

"Yes, one of us is dead," she assented; for he had lost a brother a year ago from typhoid. She repeated the words once or twice among her milk-pans: "Only one of us is dead."

"Only? Surely that is enough!" he exclaimed, surprised.

"There might be more," she answered, and spilt a great splash on the floor.

"Lord, what'll your stepmother say! You a milkmaid!"

"I wasn't attending. I don't think I ever did it before. Now, Jonker Dirk, I think you had better go."

"Go? What nonsense! I've only just come."

"Mother doesn't like it," said Roosje, blushing.

"Like what? Me? Well, she won't be troubled by my presence for the next two years. Your father was a fool to marry that woman, Roosje."

"Oh, Jonker, hush!"

"Sailors speak their mind. And besides, you know it, without my saying anything. She makes you unhappy, Roosje: I hate to think of that while I'm away." With his foot he pushed the splash of milk towards the little farm dog, who began lapping with great wags of his tail.

"She means well," said Roosje. "Good-bye, Jonker, God bless you. Good-bye."

"No, in thunder! What has the woman been saying to you, Roosje? Come, we have never had any secrets from each other, never, since I told you all my scrapes, and you—I don't think you ever got into any scrapes, not into real bad ones, at least, like me. Have you got into a scrape now?" He looked at her good-naturedly, smiling. Then suddenly, with an angry change of face and voice—"Don't listen to her! Don't believe her. Whatever she says, I've no doubt it's a lie!"

Roosje was silent for full ten seconds. Then she answered, still looking away—"She don't think I ought to have talked with you: that's all."

The great veins rose up on his neck. "Now

answer me honestly: have I ever said a word—one word—to make me deserve that?"

"No, oh, no! Not one word. But people will talk."

"Talk! Who talks? Why, I am going away. I have had a very happy month here. Who talks?"

"They—they—oh, it doesn't matter one bit."

"It matters. I will know." His voice rang low, so strong she could not have disobeyed it.

"It's only stupid servants' talk," she said, the words coming as if they were being dragged forth slowly through a loophole. "Your mother's maid has told my mother lies."

He started so violently, she could not but see it. "Tell me exactly what she said."

"I couldn't, Jonker."

"You must. At once. In an hour I shall be gone, perhaps for good."

"I couldn't." She hid her face in her hands. "She said you had said things you never could have said, and everybody had heard them."

"Well, it is true," he said simply. "See what parents we have, you and I! I told my mother, for she asked me, and my mother told her maid! Well, what does it matter? I am going away."

She took her hands from her burning face.

"Tell it me," she whispered. The shadows fell so heavily, he could barely see her outline against the pewter cans.

"No."

"Tell it me." Her voice grew softer still.

"Good-bye, good-bye."

"Tell it me! Tell it me!" The words barely sank on her breath.

"God in heaven! I love you, but I cannot marry you, so I oughtn't to have spoken at all."

"Yes, yes, yes. You love me. Of course you cannot marry me."

"I never should have spoken, but for my mother's misdoing! What can I do? I don't want you to believe lies about me. That would be too bad!"

"You love me. Of course you can't marry me. I don't want you to marry me. But, just for a little, you have loved me all the same."

"How can I marry? I cannot marry anyone."

"In time, when you come back bald-headed and with medals—medals, please!—you will marry a woman in your own rank of life."

"Confound my rank of life! When I come back, Roosje, I shall visit you in your own farm-kitchen, and wish some brave fellow joy."

She smiled, but he could not see that. He bent forward.

"Well, then, must it really be good-bye?"

"Wait a moment! One moment longer! You love me. You really love me? Say it again."

"Oh, what is the use of saying it? It cuts me like a knife."

"Dear Jonker, it needn't do that. Listen just one moment. One moment longer. Mother will be coming to look for me. I also have got something to say, Jonker. I—I also have got something to say."

"That you don't care for me? Better leave it unsaid."

"Not that—oh, not that!"

"That you are going to marry someone else? So much the better. I know something about that. My mother told me. I should never—no, not even now —have spoken, else."

"It is a lie!" She cried out the words.

Alarmed, he hushed her.

"It is a lie! What I want to say—what I MUST say at once—is not that, oh, not that! Oh, so different! Jonker, when you come back again I shan't be here. Listen!—don't interrupt me. Oh, Jonker, do you think I should have let you say as much as

you did—should have led you on to say it—yes, yes, a woman can stop a man or lead him on—if, if—unless——"

"What?"

"Jonker, you know I'm sometimes ill. Didn't you ever think it might be mother's illness? All her family die of it. I asked doctor on purpose this evening. I asked him to come and see me on purpose. I wanted to ask him before you came to say good-bye."

"You ill!" he cried. "Nonsense! you—all pink and white?"

She shook her head in the darkness.

"I *made* him tell me," she said. "I told him besides that I knew already, and that was true, though, of course, it does sound different. I can't last beyond the winter, he says. It doesn't really much matter. Tell me you love me, Jonker Dick."

"It isn't true. It isn't true."

"Yes, it is true. Nobody 'll care, when you're away. And see here, Jonker: it has brought me the great big happiness of all my life—nothing more, anyhow, could come after that."

"It isn't true. It isn't true."

"Say again that you love me before mother comes. Say it again."

He threw his arms around her, he drew her towards him. "I love you; I love you; I love you!" He rained kisses on her upturned face.

"Say it again. Oh, say it again. You see, it is the last time, Jonker!"

"I love you, I love you, I have never loved anyone before, dear: I shall never love anyone again!"

"Ah, yes, you will! You will love the woman you marry. Promise me, for my sake, you will marry a woman whom you love. Money-bags or no money-bags, Jonker, you will marry a woman you love?"

He kissed her and drew her towards him and kissed her again and again.

"This is my wedding day, you see," she whispered, "but it isn't yours, Jonker—not yours. You will marry later on—and be happy—very happy—some day."

The pitch-dark night was about them in the dairy. A bell tolled in the distance. The little dog scrambled up against his mistress, yelping, jealous, distressed.

"Oh, I love you, I love you!" she murmured. Then "good-bye," she said, and was gone.

A BIT OF TO-DAY.

A BIT OF TO-DAY.

"HE will recover," said the half a dozen doctors assembled in solemn conclave around his bed. So he died.

The wisest of them, putting on his admirable chastened expression, went to tell the widow. The dead man, as all will remember, was close upon eighty, the widow not twenty-five.

"Dear me!" she said nervously, squeezing the two bull-pups that had sat up in her lap to scowl at the doctor. "How very dreadful! How very dreadful and sad! Black doesn't suit me at all!" This last sentence she spoke to her maid when the doctor had gone away.

She was Mrs. Peter van Dobben, one of the wealthiest women in New York City. Three years ago she had been the struggling daughter of a Baptist minister in that same place. Frocks were her struggle, and gloves, and especially boots. Nine brothers and sisters grew up underneath her, whom

she hated because they seemed to be pushing her out of what home she had. She was like a sweet flaxen doll, all pink and fluffy. Old Peter van Dobben, the millionaire rubber merchant, fetched her away one fine morning out of her disdainful drudgery, and planted her in a big bay window, with a fine view of other bay windows peopled by lesser millionaires.

Now, three short years later, he was dead. The childless widow, with much bejewelled hand, settled her pretty back hair and talked to her maid of fashions in mourning. Occasionally she wondered about the will. A will is an important consideration to the childless young widow of the richest old corpse in New York.

The next thing to happen was that she knew about the will. A great many things, of course, happened before—the arrival of the "casket" among others—but all seemed to have faded away into forgetfulness in the face of the enormous fact of the will. It had been made just six months ago, and it left every penny old Peter possessed to "my nearest relation in Holland."

Mrs. van Dobben put her black-bordered pocket-handkerchief into her pocket at once. She had

stopped crying, even in public, the day before the funeral. The papers said her self-command was wonderful.

"Who, pray, is this nearest relation?" she demanded.

The solicitor could not tell.

"Find out!" said the widow. Her tone, he thought, was distinctly unfitting, considering her altered circumstances. He began to talk of difficulties, possible delays. She stopped him.

"Telegraph to Consuls," she said. "What are Consuls for?"

"Well, yes," replied the lawyer, with meditative noddings. "I can book that, of course, as legitimate expenditure."

She looked at him; suddenly she realised that she was poor. She rose with a not ungraceful movement, and went to her jewel-box that stood upon a side table. She unlocked it, extracted a string of pearls, and almost flung them in the lawyer's face.

"My dear madam! My dear madam!" he protested, bobbing back from the table.

"There can be no difficulty about the matter," she said, with dignity. "Mr. van Dobben came of a very important Dutch family. He hardly ever spoke of his relations, but he always gave me to under-

stand that they were highly connected. He ran away from school in his youth as a cabin-boy. There is no particular hurry, now I come to think of it. Have the goodness, Mr. Parsimmons, to make the necessary inquiries."

The lawyer, thus dismissed, went away and did a lot of cabling. Not with immediate success. When he called at "the van Dobben mansion" next morning, he was informed that the widow had sailed at daybreak for Europe. She had left a little letter for the lawyer. He found it to contain the torn half of a thousand-dollar note, and the curt information that the other half would be his if he stopped his inquiries for a fortnight.

Meanwhile the lady lay groaning and gurgling in her state room. She never could endure the sea, at its smoothest; a ripple made her cry out for death. But death came not, though she cried for him very often. Whereby he showed that he knew women, and, of course, his experience of their weaknesses is large. She arrived safely in Liverpool, and she pointed out to the waiter that very evening, gently but firmly, that really the steak he had brought her was a trifle overdone.

She scolded, and even bullied, the maid she had brought with her in much more explicit tones. If

no man be a hero to his valet, no woman is an angel to her maid. The maid almost forgave her. "Something wrong about the will," said the maid.

In the solitude of boat cabin and hotel bedroom, Gladys van Dobben—her father, the Baptist minister, had named her Hannah—would draw a scrap of paper from an innermost recess of her silver-gilt dressing-case, and sit staring at it for ten minutes at a stretch. Immediately after the reading of the will she had gone straight to her dead husband's desk and looked over all she could find of his private belongings. In a drawer, put away by itself, she had found the letter she held in her hand.

It was a Dutch letter; she could not make out a sentence of it. But it began, "Dierbare broeder," and that, she felt, must stand for "Dear brother;" it was signed "Jacobus"—i.e. Jacob—and it was directed from Slapsloot, a place, as revealed by the postage stamp, in Holland. The date of the letter was barely a fortnight previous to that of the will. Now, old Peter, never loquacious, had rarely referred to his pre-American days. Once he had spoken, with energy, of an only brother who, wiser than he, had resisted the temptation to marry. The occasion was a recent one—the night, as she remembered too distinctly, preceding the making of the will. For

the date of this unknown will had come as a revelation.

On June 8 he had made it. On the 7th they had had that stupid tiff about Charlie. It was absurd of old Peter to be jealous of Charlie. She had always been so careful about Charlie. But these rich old curmudgeons were all like that. He had laughed away the quarrel, with the words, "Let us say no more about it;" and the next day he, who had sworn a hundred times that she was his only relative and should inherit all his property, had gone and made a will leaving everything to this unmarried, unknown brother. She had understood the brother to be long since dead. She had always behaved decently to Peter. Poor Charlie!

She had started immediately for Europe, without any definite purpose, perhaps, but with several indefinite ones, in search of "Jacobus." Who was Jacobus? She pictured him to herself as a sort of younger Peter, but with probably more of that old-world refinement which American money-making is apt to rub off. She had once met a couple of Dutch gentlemen in society. They spoke English with ease. She had thought them singularly delightful—"Knickerbocker," you know—Washington Irving.

All that she cared about in life, except Charlie,

now belonged to "Jacobus." She thought it out constantly during the voyage: her boudoir in the New York house, with the genuine French tapestry (wonderful imitation), belonged to Jacobus; the two iron-grey ponies at "The Grange" belonged to Jacobus; the cottage at Newport was his. The idea became an obsession. She counted up a dozen lesser items —her pretty round lips cursed Jacobus.

"Well, I guess we're *there!*" said the maid, with a swoop; and commenced unlocking a trunk in the bedroom at the *Euston Hotel.*

Her mistress sat up. "Don't unpack. We go on this evening, by the night boat, to Holland."

"What place, please?" cried the maid.

"Slapsloot," said the widow van Dobben.

"And where's that?" cried the maid.

"I haven't the faintest idea; but we shall be there to-morrow."

It is superfluous to add that they were.

Not, however, without some slight complications, consequent upon their being compelled to quit paths along which the English language still possesses a more or less uncertain value.

On arriving at "The Hook," Mrs. van Dobben had inquired for the city of Slapsloot. It had been rather disconcerting to discover that the place in any

form, big or little, was unknown at the Hook. A time-table proved inefficacious. She had gone on to Amsterdam—and everything was most delightfully quaint and unlike anything—and the hotel porter found Slapsloot for her ultimately in the "Postal Guide."

"I am greatly worried, and very badly treated, and it's all very sad and a great shame," said Gladys, lying back on a couch and surveying the canals, "but, dear me! I wonder what's going to happen. I feel very curious and interested. It's all so exciting, especially Jacobus."

In the biggest room of the biggest hotel of the very small town nearest Slapsloot she prosecuted her investigations as to the best methods of "getting there." She had taken a guide with her. It was a great satisfaction to reflect that here, at least, she was miles away, literally and figuratively, from the inquisitive New York lawyer. She had nearly a week left—quite enough for her projects, whatever these might turn out to be.

"Inquire," she said with bold grandiloquence, "about the mansion of Mynheer Jacobus van Dobben!'

Mine host shook his head; but he was a heavy man, caring for nothing outside his immediate ken.

"We shall find out when we get there;" and she

got into what they call "the conveyance." She thought it most cunning. A sort of mediæval fly. But as soon as it began to tilt across the cobbles she clung onto the seat, with a face that jerked and worked like—well, like molten lead, for instance, when suddenly cooled. She had brought an English-speaking guide with her from Amsterdam, but she left him behind at the hotel. For she thought it would be a nuisance at her brother-in-law's house; he would talk about her hunting for Slapsloot, her inquiries and uncertainties. That was not at all her idea. She intended to inform Jacobus that she had talked so constantly of him with Peter, it seemed to her as if she had known and appreciated him all her life. Yes, she would say "appreciated." All at once, as she hung there, quivering, opposite her frightened and disgusted servant, she realised distinctly what she had come for and what she intended to do.

She intended to marry Jacobus, seeing that she knew him to be unmarried. She had not understood this clearly before, but she felt sure of it now. There were difficulties in the way, but she was an American, a beauty—she smiled to herself—had she not married that inveterate old bachelor, Peter, as soon as she wanted to? The idea of legal disablement, such as

exists in England, of course lay entirely outside her sphere of thought. She was going to marry Jacobus; she simply must. In the shaking waggonette she reflected on her ponies, the tapestry in the New York boudoir, the cottage at Newport—she simply *must*. And why not? She had married Peter. She pictured to herself this younger brother, a sort of Washington Irving Peter, as has been suggested before.

She drove on for hours through bleakest country; getting nervous, she probed the driver, but he only shook his head. When houses appeared in sight, she vainly questioned: Slapsloot? The answer took the form of another mile or two across the moor.

At last there came a turning to the longest road on record. A white mansion stood among gardens; a small village lay some distance beyond. The driver lifted his whip and pointed.

"Aha!" said Mrs. van Dobben. "Drive up to the house, if you please!"

When he understood, the lethargic, lubberly lad obeyed her.

It was a handsome place, beautifully kept; Gladys nodded approval.

"Just like Peter!" she said, in passing a big notice-board: "Trespassers beware!" An old gentleman was walking in front of the house with a little

brown dog. The dog yelped. An old lady sat on a bright green seat, knitting. The widow at once noticed the old gentleman's resemblance to Peter. The old lady disconcerted her with violent heart-bumpings. For she, the old lady, seemed so palpably the old gentleman's wife.

The vehicle, with its unwonted contents, stopped in a final rattle. For the old gentleman had posted himself in front of it; the little dog barked very loud.

The beautiful American had recovered her self-possession. "Mynheer van Dobben?" she said.

"By no means, madam," came the prompt Dutch reply.

The stolid boy took no notice.

"I—I beg your pardon," faltered Gladys.

The old gentleman answered testily in English that his name was Pock.

"Perhaps," continued the fair widow, annoyed by his manner, "it would not be too much to ask you to direct the driver to the house of Mynheer Jacobus van Dobben at Slapsloot?"

"I never heard the name; there's no such person," replied the old gentleman.

"Indeed, there doesn't seem to be any other house of importance in sight," said Gladys, desperately, to the maid,

The dog never ceased barking; the surly old gentleman had walked away to the house; the old lady sat watching.

"Drive on to the village," said Gladys in disgust. The village proved a very small one; a sudden shower, long expected, broke across it with a violence that sent the very hens skeltering for cover; the waggonette dripped. In the deserted street a rather nice-looking dwelling revived Gladys' spirits; it turned out to be the parsonage; the minister and his wife were both out.

"I am certain Jacobus lives at Slapsloot," said Gladys, half crying. "I must see him; I must speak to him. I cannot make it out at all."

"Please let us go back before we're murdered," said the maid.

"I won't," replied the mistress, with acerbity. "Do you think I've come across from New York without reason? My whole future depends on my speaking with my dead husband's brother *at once.*"

"You might inquire," began the maid, "in a day or two——"

"If I could employ others—if I could wait a day or two," interrupted Gladys, "I should have been utterly crazy to have come at all." And, indeed, al-

ready her whole simple plan of campaign had taken shape. Of course, she intended to present herself as the owner of Peter's many millions. Jacobus must have engaged himself to marry her—must have married her—before he learned the truth.

She had already got to hate most thoroughly the slow, suspicious Dutch peasantry before the driver had succeeded, amid the rainy wretchedness and desolation, in unearthing an individual who shook favourable response to her weary iteration of inquiry.

"Jaap Dobbe? Why didn't you say Jaap Dobbe?" remonstrated the individual. Gladys' face suddenly beamed. "He knows?" she exclaimed excitedly. "Eh, driver? Mynheer van Dobben, eh?" Animated confabulation followed between the two Dutchmen—then came another drive through brushwood and over moorland. At last a wide white building appeared amid loneliness. Before this the driver drew up with a bump.

"What now?" demanded Peter's widow.

"Jaap Dobbe," said the driver.

"Absurd," replied the widow.

The place was a small farmhouse. The green door opened slowly; a ponderous figure solemnly framed itself in the doorway.

"Jaap Dobbe?" cried the driver.

The figure nodded assent.

A moment of terrible hesitation—then Mrs. van Dobben flung herself out of the waggonette, and hurried through the pouring wet into the cottage.

The fat man, amazed beyond power of protest, had stood aside to let her pass. She sank down on a straw-bottomed chair—in her ultra-fashionable mourning—and covered, for a moment, her face with one hand.

Then she straightened herself, and looked at the man. He was enormous—purple-faced, quite common—a peasant, and in peasant dress.

Some absurd mistake, of course—not a bit like thin, rarefied Peter.

She hesitated, uncertain how best to end this ridiculous episode.

Then, feeling she must say something, she remarked—

"Slapsloot?"

The fat man gave a voluble affirmative reply.

"Van Dobben?" she continued desperately.

"Jaap Dobbe," said the man, and a lot more.

Again she hesitated. She realised that one thing

must be done at once, and she did it. Closing her eyes, with sickening tension, she drew a paper from under her corsage and laid it on the table.

When she opened her eyes the man was grinning painfully and nodding.

She knew that this was Jacobus.

Awful as that moment was she did not lose her presence of mind. In a flash of lightning that seemed to burn across her brain she saw all the things over yonder in America, all the things that made life life: she walked away to the window; she looked out and came back again. "Peter dead," she said, and swept her hand down the crape of her skirt.

"*Ja—ja,*" replied Peter's brother.

They stood facing each other for some minutes, inevitably inarticulate. Outside, the dreary waggonette waited with the maid, in the rain. Gladys went and closed the door. At last, the sheer impossibility of all preliminaries driving her to desperation—

"Much money," she said.

He stared at her.

"Money mine," she continued, and in spite of herself she blushed crimson.

When she lifted her eyes to his face she saw he had not understood!

A few drops of spite gathered in her lovely blue eyes; then she knitted her brows and pondered.

Presently she drew a silver florin from her purse and laid it on the table; he watched her. She put her finger on the coin and then rapidly waved her arms in a circle. He understood—he understood—much money!

She pointed her finger to her breast.

He took off his cap. Thank Heaven! he had understood.

He stood bowing before her. Yes, certainly he had understood.

She turned to the window and sat down deliberately, with her back to him, feeling that, in the first place, she must resolutely collect her thoughts.

Her husband had, of course, lied to her from the first about his relations. She could feel annoyed but not angry with him for that; she would have done it herself.

The most natural thing now seemed to be to leave the house immediately and go back again. Where? To what? Penniless. To New York. The wealthy widow van Dobben. Back to father and mother. One idea had dominated her, as she now wondered, from the moment of the reading of Peter's will.

She was pretty, but how many people were pretty! And she would be a great deal less pretty than the rich Mrs. van Dobben had been. She remembered how old Peter's offer had come to her as a windfall, incredible, too good to be true. Her own mother had exclaimed, Is it possible? Her father had said it was the Lord's doing; she herself had trembled daily lest old Peter should die before they had been to the church. Such things did not happen twice in a woman's lifetime. No second millionaire —the ponies—the boudoir with the hangings!

She had taken Peter. She stole a cautious side-glance at Jacobus. He was the owner of Peter's millions, and that, as she well knew, in our day is all-sufficient.

She wonld start him in London; New York would follow. It is easy to make up your mind when no choice is left you. In a few days he would hear about his inheritance, and then, certainly, he wouldn't marry *her.*

At the thought of this she gave a gasp. Rising from her chair, she went and took the letter he had written, and held it under his nose. Her little white jewelled fingers moved under the two opening words.

"Dierbare broeder." She goggled up at him with her innocent blue eyes.

"Dierbare broeder?" She tried to pronounce the words. He roared with laughter; but when he saw the sentimental tears gathering in the lovely eyes he stopped abruptly, and, looking thoroughly ashamed of himself, stroked with one red paw the little white hand.

She looked out into the pouring rain. Could she stay here that night? With signs she explained her dilemma. He caught at her meaning. Fortunately, the small farmhouse, like so many others, had two tiny rooms, unlet, for summer lodgers. He threw open a door, and exhibited them, scrupulously neat.

"At least he is clean," she thought. "How clean all these people are! Peter was right about that." She went to the entrance and called "Bridget!" The maid arrived, sour-faced. Jacobus, stumbling awkwardly, fetched the bags and wraps. Gladys wrote a note to the guide, bidding him come next morning to the village inn at Slapsloot ("Is there one, I wonder?" she reflected), and sent it off by the driver. As the waggonette rumbled away into the rain-mist across the heath, she felt like the leader of men when the smoke hid his burning ships.

Braced by this consciousness of a great emergency, she began to play her little part. She opened her big dressing-bag and extracted its gilt-stoppered

blandishments. Soft perfumes, soft lawns, and laces; an atmosphere of refinement and feminine attraction spread about her. But this sort of thing, as she well understood, is repellent to a rustic, unless, by being mixed with simplicity, it becomes irresistible. In the midst of her inevitable luxury, therefore, she was most natural and charming. She thoroughly enjoyed the humble fare he set before her; she helped scornful Bridget to lay the table. Constant misunderstandings gave rise to unceasing merriment. They "supped," with beer and steel forks, amid much gesticulation and roars of laughter. Suddenly Gladys sobered. A tear lay on her cheek. "Poor Peter!" she said. And she showed Jacobus Peter's portrait in her locket. It took a long time and much motion for Jacobus to explain that Peter had been better-looking in his youth.

"More like Jacobus?" Well, yes, more like Jacobus. Conversation, however, languished after supper. The success of the evening was certainly the widow's fearful faces over a drop of Jacobus' best Dutch gin. But, after that, all three were glad to get to bed. As Jacobus lighted the candle, he asked his new sister-in-law's name—"Naam? Naam?"

When he had understood it—not before it was

written down—he shook his head over the bit of paper. For "Gladys" in Dutch means "slippery ice," and there are proverbs about not venturing near it.

Happily unconscious of this unlucky coincidence, the pretty widow retired to rest in her cupboard of a room. The poverty of her surroundings strengthened and encouraged her. After a period of preliminary wakefulness she slept soundly, and awoke to the chirruping of birds behind a sunlit window-blind.

She lay revolving her immediate future. She must marry Jacobus without delay—any moment failure overwhelming might befall her—he would learn some sort of English, and have the best London tailor; in her three years of millionaire society she had met dozens of brutes no better than he. After all, she lived in the twentieth century, which knows but one class distinction—gold.

She was aroused from these not unpleasant reflections by the muffled music of gigglings and scufflings aloud. Little feminine squeaks of excitement mingled with lower guffaws. She leapt from her bed and peered behind the blind.

What she saw was Bridget romping round the

cow with Jacobus. Bridget, it appeared—in sudden reminiscence of her Irish home—was attempting to milk that quadruped, and Jacobus was doing his best to prevent her.

When Gladys got back into bed again, she pulled the sheet over her ears, and furiously bit a hole in it.

The next moment she rang her hand-bell, peal upon peal, for her maid. She was as sharp as she dared to be with this menial, for American domestics are not European. "How common the common people are!" she said to herself. She sent a message to Jacobus that she would have breakfast in her room. Jacobus, Bridget informed her, had gone to the village.

When she made her appearance in the kitchen a couple of hours later, she found her brother-in-law waiting there in company with a half-grown youth. The latter informed her in broken but intelligible English that he was the son of the local pastor, studying for a schoolmaster, and that Jacobus had fetched him to act as interpreter. She hesitated for a moment; then she boldly put Jacobus's letter in the lad's hands. Jacobus turned purple. "Nay, nay," he exclaimed. Then he seemed to think better of it, and drew back the hand he had extended.

With amazement the widow van Dobben heard the contents of the letter. It was a confession, after close on a quarter of a century. The younger brother wrote to tell the other that he, the younger, on the father's death, had kept the entire inheritance of more than two hundred pounds. He had done so because a partition would signify the sale of the cottage, ruin. But his horrible secret of wrong-doing left him no rest by night or day. So he wrote now at last, entreating pardon, promising restitution. What would become of him he knew not. The letter was addressed to Mr. Peter van Dobben, in America. Of course it had at once reached *the* Peter van Dobben. For all Jacobus could guess, the runaway was long since dead. Perhaps he hoped so.

Receiving no answer, he had accepted this view, not ungratefully. Peter, on his part, had stuck to his original opinion, that all his Dutch connexions were best left untraced.

And now Peter's widow had brought him the letter. Probably with a message from Peter, for she was a rich lady, a great lady: he could not believe that his brother, in dying, would have turned him out of his humble house and home. Tortured by uncertainty, he had gone to fetch the scholar. He now asked humbly what the message was.

Gladys saw her chance at once. "I have no message," she said.

His face fell; the great, good-natured red face turned almost pale.

"Of course he will have to refund the money," she added. She even said "principal and interest," for in business matters a woman rarely knows where to stop; but the schoolboy's English did not stretch the length of "principal."

"Ja—ja," said Jacobus, and his fat body shook. She eyed him contemptuously, this ridiculous Dutch peasant, with his conscience and his comic misfortune, one of the wealthiest magnates, had he but known it, of New York. He might know it—to-morrow. She resolved not to go too far.

She sat down by the kitchen table, and her mourning fell about her in very becoming folds. She was delightful to look at, and she knew it. She ought to have been enjoying a period of dignified seclusion at "The Grange." Her heart cried out in hate of Peter.

"Tell Mr. Jacobus van Dobben," she said, "that his brother died enormously wealthy."

"Ja—ja," said Jacobus.

"His wish was that all his money should pass to Mr. Jacobus——"

"Eh?" said the latter.

"On condition of his marrying me."

"I—I—I would rather not," said Jacobus.

The boy checked a grin, and translated a more courteous rejection of the offer.

"Is the man mad?" cried the enraged widow. But a little later she condescended to more rational parley.

"And ruin?" she said, staring at Jacobus. "Ruin?"

"Heaven help me!" he replied; but a lot of little beads stood out on his forehead.

She rose; sailed up the rough kitchen once or twice; then she stopped in front of the man.

"You refuse to marry me? Refuse?"

"I—I—would rather not," said Jacobus.

She looked long at his distracted yet dogged countenance. Then she sank down by the table and burst into tears.

"It is I who am ruined," she sobbed, her face in her hands, "for Peter has left Jacobus all his money, and trusted his honour to marry me."

Jacobus needed no translation of the tears, which most greatly distressed him. The words, when he understood them, seemed to trouble him even more.

"My—my, what?" he stammered.

"Honour," repeated the youth, in huge enjoyment of the scene.

Jacobus waited a long time—and the widow wept a great deal—before he said huskily, "I'll do it."

The widow stopped crying, sat up, and bade the boy go for his father. Her idea of European marriage laws was built up on Mr. Jingle's special licence, Wilkie Collins' "Man and Wife," and a recent Scotch scandal in New York society. In Dakota you could be married in five minutes; Europe was slow, aristocratic; you would probably need twelve.

But it took an hour and a half to fetch the parson. Meanwhile Jacobus withdrew to the yard, with a promise to return which she did not apprehend. She took a novel from her bag and tried to read it.

"Madam," said the minister standing in the middle of the kitchen. He was a long-necked individual, with a look skywards, and every word that he uttered was important. "Madam!"—he looked from Gladys to Jacobus and back again—"I understand you wish to marry this worthy person. Well, what have I to do with that?"

"You speak very good English," replied Gladys, smiling more sweetly than she need have done had the remark been truer.

The minister bowed stately approval and waited for more.

The widow van Dobben laid down her yellow-back novel.

"Marry us," she said.

"It shall be very pleasant to do so," replied the minister, "if spared."

"At once," said the widow van Dobben.

"It cannot!" exclaimed the minister; "the banns——" He had looked out this word in his son's dictionary before starting.

"A special licence!" cried Gladys.

"Will want a fourteen night."

"A fortnight! Why not say three months?"

"And now I am coming to consider him, madam, when did your husband retire?"

"Some weeks ago," answered Gladys, blushing crimson.

"You cannot in our country, then, remarry for nearly a year."

The widow van Dobben put her black-bordered bit of cambric in front of her face, and burst into very real tears,

"Nay! nay!" remonstrated Jacobus, who, of course, had not understood a word. The minister rapidly enlightened him.

Meanwhile Gladys sobbed on, disconsolate, crushed. Good-bye to the ponies and the tapestry.

Her distressful beauty much exercised the minister. He began to speak in tenderest tones.

"I am thinking," he said, "a friend is coming. He will help you. The vehicle is arrived from the town, and your guide; and it has brought a gentleman, a compatriot, inquiring. I see them at the inn. I am thinking I hear rumblings."

Jacobus was thinking so too, for he went to the door. A moment later he moved his portly body aside, letting pass Mr. Parsimmons, the American lawyer.

"Mrs. Peter van Dobben, I am glad to have found you," said the lawyer.

"But you've lost your thousand dollars," replied the widow with animus.

"I am not so certain of that." The lawyer smiled.

"It wants three days to your fortnight——"

"Even though it wanted four! I came after you as quickly as I could, for on the day of your departure I received a sealed envelope from a friend of

your late husband, inscribed to be sent to Mr. Parsimmons twenty-four hours after the reading of the will."

"Well? well?" stuttered the widow, tearing holes in her handkerchief.

"It contained a second will, madam, made a couple of hours after the first. In it he left you, with the exception of a considerable legacy to his brother" —Mr. Parsimmons made a provoking pause—"all his property."

"The villain!" shrieked Gladys.

"A strange comment," said the lawyer coolly. "You shall pay me, mistress," he added to himself, "for this journey." Aloud, he continued—"For reasons I am unable to appreciate, your lamented husband wished to create, during a brief period, an erroneous impression in your mind."

"The mean, spiteful villain!" wept Gladys.

"You are left entirely free to marry whom you like." The lawyer stole a look at Jacobus. "There is only one exception. A Mr. Charles——"

"Hold your tongue!" exclaimed Gladys, rising. She was the richest widow of New York; she could afford to bully a solicitor. She walked with stately step to the door.

"And what is the end of it all?" questioned the puzzled Jacobus.

"Your brother has left all his money to his wife," replied the minister, "but it seems there is a legacy for you."

Jacobus gave a "shoof" of triumph.

"Then I shall marry Brigitta," he said.

A COMEDY OF CRIME.

A COMEDY OF CRIME.

In the placid summer sunset the village smithy rested. Surely there is nothing more suggestive of repose from labour than a village smithy with a fire that is turning grey.

Under that great beech the brawny smith sat thoughtful. His big arms, in the sleeves they seldom wore ere nightfall, hung idle across his bigger knees. The hard toil of the day—of the week—was over. On the fields, and the neighbouring cottages, and the silent road, lay a drowse of gathering darkness. It was all very peaceful and tender, with an occasional murmur or tinkle; night was approaching, the happy summer night, in which even slow men's senses are stirred by the thought of the fairies' awakening; the kine lowed from the distance, full of the day's calm memories, in buttercup content.

The smith sat, his black brows frowning heavily, thinking of nothing at all.

From the homestead over the way, a shiny white

building, uncomfortably spruce, there issued a long thin figure, in sombre clothing, which figure, majestically crossing a hundred yards of field and garden-plot, advanced toward the sleeping smithy. The smith sat well back, his round eyes a-goggle, and snorted.

"Neighbour Blufkin, I wish you a good evening," said the lanky old person in the black tail-coat.

"Good evening, Neighbour Boll," grumped the smith.

The first speaker blinked his eyes. "To-morrow is the blessed Sabbath," he said.

"Damn the blessed Sabbath!" was the unexpected reply.

Elder Boll uplifted his lean hands to the listening skies. An awful silence spread down from them upon the little group—the smithy, the beech, the two men.

"I beg its pardon," presently began the smith, his cheerful face ashamed, "I'm sure I beg the blessed Sabbath's humble pardon. I didn't mean to say as much as that. It's blasphemy. But you make me do it, Neighbour Boll."

"I forgive you with all my heart," said Elder Boll. "But, I hope, neighbour, that you now have duly considered my warning and exhortation of the

night—let me see—the night before last." He cautiously let himself down on the seat beside his burly victim, a proceeding of considerable difficulty, as the victim did not budge.

"The night before last and every other night," spitefully retorted the smith. "It's just jaw—jaw—jaw. Well, you may jaw till Doomsday. I can't run away."

"Doomsday, indeed!" echoed the elder, and dreadful thunder rolled with relish through his tones. "Doom! Doom! Doom!"

"Now it's you that's swearing," said the smith, reproachfully, and wedged the tobacco down into his pipe.

"I shan't get tired! Don't fear," continued Boll, wagging his cadaverous face to and fro. "No, I'll warn you, neighbour; I'll reprove you! I'll exhort you—there's no escaping me, Blufkin. 'Sarah,' says I to my wife every night, 'I'll never rest till I've brought that man, like a penitent, into the sacred edifice again.'"

"I'd have gone back a month ago, if it hadn't been for you," snorted the smith.

"Ah, *there* speaks the voice of the scorner. But you needn't try to escape *me,* neighbour. No peace shall I know—nor you—till I've saved John Blufkin

from his reprobate, hardened, impenitent condition, saved him like a—like a——"

"Don't you burn your fingers," interposed the smith, threateningly.

"Brand from the burning!" triumphantly exclaimed the elder, catching at the simile. He sat up, or rather "clung up," as well as he could, on his end of the seat, and eyed, with calm certitude, the big mass beside him.

"Now, look ye here!" bellowed the smith. "See what happens. Last Kermesse-time—and damn all Kermesses, says I—that's not blasphemy, but religion —last Kermesse-time—there never was a little misfortune befell in a village or Kermesse was to blame for it—['Amen!' said the elder]—last Kermesse-time I finds a young fool a-trying to kiss my girl Suzie against her will. In the booth it was, where the five-legged calf was—*my girl!*" He started up with a roar, and shook his mighty fist in the frightened elder's face.

The latter, shrinking back precipitately, lost his uncertain balance off the seat's edge, and subsided upon a heap of rusty barrel-hoops that lay handy by the smith's door. He was up again in a moment, with a squeak. As he hurriedly and anxiously be-

gan rubbing himself, the rude blacksmith's laughter rang loud and long.

"Why the devil can't you sit when you sit?" said the smith. "What's the use of seating yourself like that beside as good a bench as ever bore a weight like mine onto nothing at all?"

"Onto barrel-hoops," corrected the old man, savagely. "Untidy heaps of rubbish lying about a respectable man's house, and on Saturday evening, too!"

"I'm not a respectable man," retorted the smith, with vigour, "and nobody knows it better'n you. When I hears my girl cry out I goes for that young fellow, and I gives him what for. I don't say I didn't give him more than what I intended——"

"You half killed him," interrupted the elder, viciously. "You'd had too much, and he'd had too much, and you forgot that vengeance is Mine——"

"Yours?" cried the indignant smith. "You think you can put your finger——"

"Blufkin, you are a heathen! I *pity* you!" piped the shrill old man, with immeasurable scorn. "Surely you know that vengeance wasn't yours, but——"

"Yes, that's what the magistrate said," continued Blufkin, sullenly. "'Don't you know,' says he, 'that the police are there to repress misconduct?' Police!

Repress! Damn the police! I wouldn't apologise, not on a red-hot gridiron, for swearing at *them!*"

"I am an old man," said Elder Boll, with admirable precaution, "and I tell you, you are a profane brawler. And what did you get for your pains? Eight days' imprisonment. For the rest of your life you stand marked a——"

"Don't say the word again!" burst in the enraged Blufkin.

"Well, I'll only think it," retorted the elder. "All the village thinks it, and always will."

The other ground his teeth, and the veins stood out black upon his forehead.

"And therefore I say unto you repent," continued the elder, sweetly gazing at the pale-blue sky. "You just come back to church; we'll all see that means you're sorry. Henk, that you half killed, 'll see you're sorry. He won't mind. You just come. We'll see you're sorry. That'll be repentance, atonement, remorse, a begging of everybody's pardons for the public offence; a humbling of yourself in the day of your abasement." He rose up, in all his rusty lankiness, and projected his piercing finger at Blufkin's chest.

"You go home," gurgled Blufkin.

The elder carefully surveyed his companion's

countenance, and then suddenly walked off without saying good night.

It was almost dark now. In the softly shaded night, all balm and tranquil happiness, the blacksmith's pretty daughter that the Kermesse row had been about, sweet, simple Suzie, the apple of her father's eye, came down the quiet country road on her retnrn from the weekly mission meeting. Beside her walked Peter Boll, the elder's son, that was learning for lay evangelist, a sort of electro-plated parson.

"How sweet the air is!" said Peter.

"It is," said Suzie.

"But not as sweet as you," suggested Peter.

"How silly!" answered Suzie.

"It's the truth!" cried the lovesick swain.

"Gospel truth?" demanded Suzie, thereby catching the future theologian on the horn of a dilemma.

"Well, it's true enough for you and me," he made cautious reply. "Don't you like to hear me say it, Suzie?" he continued.

"Of course I like it in a way," frankly answered the girl. "Leastwise I suppose I shall when you've spoken to father."

"I'll speak to your father as soon as I can. You don't think, Suzie, there's any chance to-morrow?"

But Suzie shook her head.

"If father 'd been a-going to church to-morrow, he'd have got himself shaved at the barber's to-night."

The young man sighed. "Still, there's no knowing for certain," he ventured. "If the spirit was to move him—"

Suzie shook her head all the harder. "The spirit couldn't move him unshaved," she said.

"Father is that set on it!" groaned Peter. "He hasn't a good word for the smith. 'Jailbird,' he calls him. 'Jailbird.' I get sick of the word"—Suzie stamped one pretty foot—"don't you get angry, Suzie: he *is* an unrighteous unbeliever. Father's only thinking of his soul."

"You leave my father's soul alone," said Suzie.

"I'm not meddling with it, but, you see, I ain't an elder. When I've been ordained a preacher—I shall have to meddle with it then!" He lifted a complacent smile to the lofty vault of heaven. A solitary star returned the smile.

"My own father-in-law!" he added. "I shall have to convert him then."

"You'll find it pretty hard work," replied Suzie, with a shrug of her shapely shoulders.

"Pooh! I tell you I'm bound to convert him. A pretty name I should get as a preacher, if I couldn't convert my own father-in-law."

"Well, you try," exclaimed Suzie, in a pet. "He's not your father-in-law yet, and I'm not at all sure he ever will be. Father's worth two of you, Peter. He licked Henk for making me cry out. You'll never lick Henk!"

"He's stronger 'n me," replied Peter; "I must think of my good-conduct test. If anybody was to show impediment——"

"Oh, there's nothing wrong about your good-conduct test, I'll be bound. Poor father! You wouldn't have licked Henk."

"Licking's sinful: the Bible says we should turn the other cheek."

"Yes, that's what I ought to have done to Henk," remarked Suzie, complacently. "It was silly of me to cry out like that, and at Kermesse-time too. He meant no harm, but he'd drunk too much."

"Suzan, for shame!" The aspirant preacher fell back.

"Henk isn't half a bad fellow! I like him," cried Suzie, wilfully. They stood still by the fence round the smith's garden, where the side-road curves into the laurel bushes.

"Say another word, and I *will* thrash him!" cried the infatuated lover.

"Do," said a hearty voice, and a figure, stepping forth from the shade of the bushes, brushed the candidate aside as a broom might sweep away a cobweb. "You'll have to, if you stop another minute, for I'm going to kiss Suzie again."

"Don't. Go away," said Suzie. She almost let the two sentences run into one.

"There's two things I want to tell you, Suzie, before I do," continued Henk. "First, I'm sorry I was a brute to frighten you. Secondly, your father didn't hurt me much. All the talk about death's door was malicious slander, set about by some people —they best know why." He shot the last sentence at Peter.

"Don't shout so, for Heaven's sake!" gasped Suzie.

But her warning came too late. A big head appeared over the tall fence, and the smith's loud bass demanded:

"Suzie, who's with you there? Come in."

"Father's standing on that horrid rain-barrel," whispered Suzie. "It's all right, father. Only Peter Boll, walking home."

"You come in at once!" The smith stumbled off his rain-barrel.

"Now you mark this," declared Blufkin, as soon

as his rosy-faced daughter made her innocent entry into the kitchen. "I'll have no flirtation with Peter Boll."

"Oh!" said Suzie. "Mother!"

The cheeriest, healthiest, handsomest old cluck in the village immediately responded to the cry of her chick.

"Now, don't you talk foolishness, Blufkin," interposed the fat vrouw, laughing, because she always laughed when she spoke, unless there were cause for tears. "I suppose you don't want the prettiest girl in the country to marry at all?"

"I don't say that."

"Well, it looks as if you meant it. One young fellow comes courting her, and you give him a black eye; another——"

"He's a wild 'un," interrupted the smith.

"Granted that he be a bit wild before marriage. You was wild after. And Peter Boll. Too good, I suppose?"

"Yes," thundered the smith. "You've hit it, old lady. Peter's too good. No son-in-law of mine shall turn up the whites of his eyes at his wife's father. I've enough of the old man's preaching; I won't stand the son's." He banged his fist on the table at "won't," and Suzie screamed. "'Jailbird!'

says the old hypocrite. 'Jailbird!' pipes the young one. I'm a jailbird, am I?" He threw out his chest and faced the two women.

"Well, you are, after a way," replied the wife, thinking to soften him.

"I'm a jailbird, am I?" he repeated quietly, turning to his daughter.

"Oh, father, I don't know."

"Yes, you do. Am I a jailbird?"

"Of course you are, in a way," stammered Suzie, beginning to cry.

"Of course I am. Now, mark my words. Your mother says I make difficulties about your marrying whom you like or she likes! No, I don't, none but one. The man that you marry must have been in prison, Suzie. That's all that I ask." He turned on his heel.

"What on earth does the creature mean?" exclaimed the mother.

Blufkin paused by the door. "What he says," was his stern reply. "You want no better son-in-law than your husband, mistress. There's dozens of honest young fellows have got into scrapes about poaching or fighting or larking, a hundred times better than the sneaks that have kept out. And Suzie shall have a jailbird for a husband, or she

shan't bring the man into this house!" He waited in the doorway as if half irresolute. "I swear it by all that's sacred," he said, and disappeared into the smithy.

All the colour had gone from the mother's ruddy cheeks. "Oh, if only he hadn't said them last words!" she sobbed, and sank down on a chair.

"He don't mean 'em," exclaimed Suzie, scared; "he often says 'em."

"Never, child. Mean 'em or not, he'll stick to them now. When father says 'by all that's solemn', he don't count that for much. But, Suzie, when I married the good man, he swore to me 'by all that's sacred' he'd never get drunk again except at Kermesse-time. He'd broke his oath before"—the poor woman's tones went shaky—"but 'I'll swear to you by all that's sacred,' he says with a frightened face, and, Suzie, he's kept to it; he wouldn't dare not."

Suzie lifted up her voice and wailed.

"During all these twenty years he's never got drunk, except at Kermesse, regular. And when he came back from—jail last month, he walks into this kitchen here with a face as white as yon tablecloth, and 'I'll stick to my two drams a day,' he says, 'Kermesse or not,' he says; 'I swear it by all that's

sacred.' I've never heard him say it but just that twice and now. Oh, Suzie, you'll never be able to marry Peter now! Are you really sure you want to?"

"Yes," said Suzie, rebelliously.

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes," groaned the mother. "And it's very sudden, Suzie. You never used to think much of him, the canting—h'm. It was always Henk I thought you liked."

"Never!" exclaimed Suzie, with quite superfluous vehemence, turning very red.

Her mother stole a glance at her.

"There'll be some chance for Henk," said the vrouw, with a little ripple of humour, "though I never heard of his poaching. Well, a girl must have her own way about a husband. I had mine. Though if you was to ask me, Suzie, I *think* you're acting like the squire's daughter I was lady's-maid to, who married the wrong man, and that's why they called it 'pick.'"

"Father's drove away Henk," murmured Suzie.

"Well, child, you needn't have screamed so loud. And at Kermesse-time, too, and your father so hasty. Your father's like a lord about his womanfolk; I will say that. There, call him in to supper. Hear him knocking bits of cold iron about!"

The meal was a gloomy one, but a few hours later Suzie's rather sulky slumbers were disturbed by the well-known sound of her mother's laugh. She opened her eyes to the glare of a candle and the shaking of a loose white mass. The ponderous vrouw sank into a chair by the bedside.

"What is it, mother?" asked Suzie, not over graciously.

"Suzie—hi! hi! hi!—now tell me, Suzie, you're quite sure you want to marry Parson Peter Boll?"

"I don't know. Let me sleep," answered the poor girl, closing her eyes.

"Well, you shall have your choice. A girl seldom changes her mind when it's set on the wrong 'un. If you want Peter you shall have him, child. I had to come and tell you that. I've got an idea."

She rose heavily, still shaking her sides, and moved towards the door. "It come to me as I was undoing my back hair," she said.

"What idea?" cried Suzie, suddenly bolt upright in the bed.

"I'll tell you all about it in the morning. I must work it out."

"Well, I can afford to wait."

"That's a bad sign for Peter," replied the vrouw, closing the door behind her.

Next morning being the Sabbath, everybody went to church, except Blufkin. He stood, uncomfortable, behind his window, and watched the people go.

And he stood defiant before his door and saw them all come back. His wife and daughter walked slowly beside Peter. Before they separated, the vrouw's idea had taken more definite shape.

"Who wills the end must will the means." The smith's wife quoted this bit of well-born wisdom several times to Peter before she could get him to see how true it is. Her plan, in half a dozen words, was this: The smith, whose honest self-respect had been unduly humiliated, must be humoured in this crotchet of his about having a son-in-law no better than himself. To put the matter plainly, Peter must be helped to commit a crime. The vrouw herself felt that Peter, unabashed, would be a trial beyond endurance.

"But I can't sin," pleaded Peter.

"Nor you needn't," replied the ready vrouw. "You can take the money—won't it be yours when you marry Suzan?—besides, you'll return the box to me an hour later."

"I can't do it," said Peter.

"And I'll show you what's inside."

Peter pricked up his ears. "I can't," he repeated,

with the decision of weakness. "If I was to be found out——"

"Where'd your good-conduct test be?" interjected Suzie, slyly.

"Well, then, do the other thing—what I said first. It's the better," cried the vrouw, her face all ripples of laughter. "Go for Henk."

"I cuc—cuc—can't," gasped the wretched youth.

"Or you might try a bit of honest poaching."

"Lord! I might get shot!" cried Peter. "That's worse than a fight."

"Well, that's what I thought," said the vrouw, decidedly. "I thought you'd mind prigging something least. I promise you I'll make things right enough. I'll explain to the smith, and he'll be glad to get quit of his foolish oath. The box with the money that Suzie's great-aunt left her is in the wardrobe in my bedroom. I'll leave the door unlocked. The good man sleeps in the parlour all Sunday evening. You'll put the ladder to the window at the back—hi! hi! You'll bring me the box at once, and before I tell the smith a word I'll make him swear by all that's sacred that Suzie shall marry you, if she wants to, as soon as you've done something which could get you into prison!" The jolly vrouw

laughed on, as Peter thought, beyond rational cause for laughter.

"But he'll call me a thief," expostulated Peter.

"Only between ourselves; he'd never shame his daughter's husband in public. And the pleasure of calling Elder Boll's son a thief—he'd take you for that alone."

"But not if he thinks I *am* a thief!"

"Does your father think my man a 'jailbird'?" She turned on him triumphantly. "Do you want to marry Suzie or don't you? Well, nothing'll prove your love to him like you doing all this for her sake. And he'll have his gibe ready to fling at you when you start preaching righteousness—as you will."

"There's no sin, as I can see," said Peter, reflectively; "but there's a risk."

"Yes, the box is heavy," continued the smith's wife. "There's a good deal in the box; you'll know it by its weight. You're sure you want to marry Suzie?" She stole an ugly look at him from out her cheerful eyes.

"You needn't ask him again, please, mother," said Suzie, with uplifted nose.

Peter gazed at the pretty tilted feature, but, alas! his thoughts were of the box. Suzie was known to

have inherited money; the wildest rumours circulated as to the amount. Had ever mercenary lover a better opportunity before marriage of finding out exactly what he loved?

"You'll show me what's inside?" he said.

"I keep my promises," answered the vrouw, shortly. "Yes."

"And you'll lock the parlour door?"

"Don't I tell you he's asleep all Sunday evening? A-sitting looking up the road with his eyes shut!"

"And you'll stop with him all the time and keep him from coming after me?"

"*He* won't come after you," replied the smith's wife, with much meaning.

"I'll do it," said Peter. "It's a capital way."

"It is," declared Suzie's mother. But she again laughed inordinately, as she watched Peter cross to his home. "Suzie," she said, "you're a fool, girl, but I pity you. It's your father's doing. And what can we do? Henk——"

"Oh, mother, please don't talk of Henk! It *is* father's doing. I never want to hear his name again."

"I was only thinking that if Henk were to do something that got him into prison, it wouldn't be stealing a money-box." She repeated these words

with many furtive glances and head-shakings at her daughter. She slipped out in the afternoon, and went, as she said, to see her sister; but when she came back she laughed so much that the smith was annoyed at her untimely gaiety. He felt very cross himself, weighed down by his silly oath of the night before. He had a great opinion of his wife's judgment and a poor one of his own, but he knew that even she could not release him from the bonds of "all that's sacred." A terrible power indeed.

"Don't be a silly featherhead!" he said; so she knew he was longing for her guidance.

When the still Sabbath even had fallen, Elder Boll came round to the smith's door for a little friendly chat. The vrouw met him with her finger on her lips. "Hush, he's asleep," she said.

"He is," replied the elder; "in trespasses and sin. Stand aside, vrouw; 'tis my mission to wake him!" And he banged a loud bang with his stick on the parlour door.

The vrouw shrugged her shoulders, and grinned an expressive grin. "Oh, of course," she said, "if it's your *mission* to wake him!" And she flung wide the door.

"Giggle not, woman!" said the elder, sternly, as he took his seat beside the smith and began to

expound the beauty of repentance in the manifestly fallen, the value of public humiliation after patent shame.

Meanwhile Peter, having assured himself, by repeated peeping, of the smith's sleepy presence at the parlour window, having even waited until he could distinctly hear a continuous snore, crept round to the unlocked gate at the back of the garden, found the ladder, as advised, in the outhouse, and softly stole up through the grateful darkness to the open window on the second floor. His heart went pit-a-pat, but whether with fear or expectation he could hardly have told himself. His hands trembled as he seized the box in the cupboard, and felt its enormous weight. He knew that this trembling of the hands was a tribute of nature to gratitude awakened and to hope that soared beyond hope!

He hurried with his pleasing burden to the window and rapidly felt along the sill. The ladder was gone.

"Oh Lord!" he said, and he was such a hypocrite that really one cannot be sure whether the words were not a prayer.

He looked hastily to right and left; there was no escape. But at that very moment he needs must fancy that he heard a sound on the stairs.

He looked down the wall, trying to measure its height in the darkness. It was not so very high, and the water-butt stood close beside it. The ladder must have fallen among the bushes. There was nothing for it but to slip down and get a footing on the water-butt.

He placed the box on the window-sill, and let himself down by both hands. Clinging tight, he took the handle of the box between his heavy jaws, and felt, dangling with both legs, for the top of the water-butt.

Alas! at that moment, in the very gasp of success, a violent pain shot across his body and changed the gasp to a howl. He twisted under it, with a wrench, that caught his flapping coat-tail in an iron hook against the wall, and the money-box dropped clanging to the ground. For a terrible moment he hung there, shrieking with agony, as blow after blow descended, lustily dealt, halfway down his long wriggling frame. Several people had come running out of the house with a lamp. His screams, objurgations, and curses rose on the calm air, alternately threatful and pitiable—in a minute it was all over, and Peter lay spluttering in the water-butt. They pulled him out quickly, and propped him up against the wall.

Then he saw all their faces at once, in a circle, Suzie's and her mother's, and the smith's, Henk's—and his father's!

"Peter!" screamed the horrified elder.

That was almost the worst of all. The dishevelled and dripping lover saw, as his rapid glances travelled round the company, amazement and amusement written on every brow. Only the stolid, handsome yeoman, whose hand held a goodly switch, fresh cut from the bushes, wore an air of calm content.

"Peter!" cried the elder, wringing his hands. "Oh, what a fall was there!"

"There was indeed!" said the smith; "into the water-butt."

But Peter's eyes now rested on the money-box. It had struck against a rail and burst open. A great brick had fallen out, leaving it empty. "Why, there's nought but a lump of brick in it!" he said.

"What! a thief!" exclaimed Blufkin, finding speech.

"A thief!" repeated Henk. "And I thought he came after Suzie."

The vrouw began to laugh and laugh.

"Get away!" she cried, winking to Henk. "What do you mean, you young rogue, by prowling about this house when nobody knows you're near?"

"Well," replied Henk, and hung his head before the smith's uncertain gaze, "you see, I—*am* after Suzie." He straightened himself. "Yes, dang it all," he said, "and in spite of all, I'm after Suzie."

"Where's Suzie's money?" suddenly shouted the smith, and ran toward the prostrate figure with menace in face and gesture. Peter doubled up and shrieked.

"Keep cool, smith!" called his consort. "Suzie's money is safe enough. It'll never be Peter Boll's!"

Peter Boll lifted his angry eyes to her face, and a look of intelligence stole across them. "I don't want the money," he said, "but I'll have my revenge of that howling brute."

"Who did you say was 'howling?'" asked Henk.

"Assault and battery," responded Peter.

"Oh Lord, yes, assault and battery!" chimed in Elder Boll. "Peter, my boy, never you mind. I know you meant no harm. Imprisoned for assault and battery!"

"Like father," said Suzie amazed at her boldness.

"Shall I make it worth your while?" asked Henk, switching the air as he spoke.

The smith interposed with outstretched hand.

"It's Peter must go to jail for stealing my bricks,"

he said, cheerfully. "Shake hands, Henk, and let bygones be bygones. I love you for licking the skulking cad."

"We'll have the law on him, never you fear!" cried the elder.

"You're sure you will?" interposed Vrouw Blufkin, suddenly pushing to the front.

"Sure!"

"Certain?"

"What does the woman mean? I never swore in my life, but I'll swear to Henk's going to prison for assault and battery."

"Then in that case he'll be a jailbird like me——" began the smith, as a grin broke slowly across his awkward features.

"The pair of you, indeed, in a Christian parish."

"And your clerical son," concluded the smith.

"So Suzie can take her choice," suggested Suzie's mother, as the elder fell back, disconcerted.

"Tush, tush!" said the smith, "we'll all go to church together before anybody goes to prison!"

THE END.